

**An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach: A Participatory Action Research
Study**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
in the College of Kinesiology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

Mark Epp

©Copyright Mark George Epp, April, 2020. All rights reserved.

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my dissertation.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Dean

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

University of Saskatchewan

116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place

Saskatoon Saskatchewan S7N 5C9

Canada

Dean

College of Kinesiology

University of Saskatchewan

87 Campus Drive

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0W6

Canada

ABSTRACT

A high performance sports model, as commonly constructed, highlights the performance excellence of athletes, with priorities being the development and backing of elite athletes, and, according to high performance coaches, winning in competition (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). One of the challenges of the high performance sports model is that high performance coaches feel their credibility, and perhaps job security, is directly tied to winning (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). This perspective places a lot of pressure on high performance coaches. In fact, high performance sport has the potential to push coaches in an unhealthy direction in terms of how they treat their athletes (Jacobs, Smith, & Knoppers, 2017). Therefore, it is essential that high performance coaches be provided with a coaching approach that allows them to maximize athlete development while they remain mindful of athlete physical and psychological well-being.

The world of psychology has provided the building blocks for a coaching approach that enables high performance coaches to maximize athlete development while remaining mindful of athlete physical and psychological well-being. In the late 1950's, psychologist Carl Rogers (1957) began sharing his experientially-based thoughts about how someone could most effectively help other people engage in positive personal development. Rogers felt people had a natural inclination to self-actualize (Tobin, 1991). He claimed that helping people on a journey of positive personal development required the creating of three core facilitative conditions: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). Rogers (1958) also emphasized the importance of recognizing that the person one is trying to help is in a "...process of *becoming*... (p. 14)."

The benefits of Rogers' approach were empirically validated through decades of research (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). However, only in recent years has any direct application of Rogerian principles targeted the coach-athlete relationship (Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2014), with no specific targeting of the high performance coach-athlete relationship. These early initiatives sought to advocate what is called an athlete-centred approach to coaching (Nelson et al., 2014).

Rogers' perspective on helping people pursue positive personal development (Rogers, 1958) potentially points high performance coaches in the direction of four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: (a) The coach sees the sport experience through the eyes of the athlete (empathy), (b) The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete (congruence), (c) The coach acts in the athlete's best interests (unconditional positive regard), and (d) The coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself (a process of becoming). Adherence to these principles is the essence of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

A participatory action research study designed to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being, had not been previously conducted and, therefore, seemed a logical first exploratory step. Incorporating a participatory action research approach in a high performance sport setting was essential because action research has the goal of activating research participants' processing that applies a critical lens to the way they have traditionally functioned, and hopefully counteracts any mistreatment that may come to light (Kemmis &

McTaggart, 2000). I conducted a participatory action research study from October, 2018 until May, 2019 with coaches and athletes of a high performance sport academy. The study followed Stringer and Genat's (2004) five phase participatory action research model consisting of research design, data generation, data analysis, communication, and action. Through semi-structured interviews, and a series of biweekly meetings, the athletes generated data related to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. I communicated and discussed athlete data with the coaches, and products of these discussions were specific action plans undertaken by the coaches as they sought to incorporate athlete-centred high performance coaching principles into their coaching practices. During the time period between biweekly meetings, I monitored, in practices and games, the coaches' actions in the context of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

The findings showed that both the athletes and the coaches viewed the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in a positive way and, in fact, showed that the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles could be effectively categorized into two broader coaching principles: building connections and imposing demands. The athletes, by a wide margin, supported the notion that coaches who build connections with the athletes make the athletes more receptive and responsive to the coaches' demands. This link between building connections and imposing demands was embraced by the coaches, along with a sensitivity to try and find the proper balance between the two principles. The positive view both athletes and coaches had, regarding these principles, points to the possibility that an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is both achievable and effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kent Kowalski, for guiding me through this research experience. His thoughtfulness and thoroughness in helping me produce a quality finished product is something for which I will always be grateful. I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Keith Walker, Dr. Louise Humbert, and Mr. Doug Hillis, and my external advisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom. Their support is greatly appreciated and valued.

In addition, I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the University of Saskatchewan's College of Kinesiology for contributing funding during my research journey. The SSHRC funding support came through grant number 862-2016-0004. On a final note, I would like to thank Coach Sommers (pseudonym), Coach Thomas (pseudonym), and the academy athletes for being willing to participate in this study. They are the reason why the potential effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was established, and why this approach may open the door to more positive and effective high performance coach/athlete connections going forward.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Christine and my sons Tyler, Jeremy, and Derek. Their unconditional love and support shows me, on a continual basis, how the world can be brightened by individuals genuinely caring for one another. Hopefully this dissertation can, in some way, honor my family's amazing love and care for me, by providing principles through which high performance coaches can genuinely care for their athletes and help their athletes become all they can be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES	x
CHAPTER 1	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW	4
1.2.1 Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Personality Theory as it Relates to the High Performance Coach-Athlete Relationship	7
1.2.2 Research Pointing Toward the Importance of a More Humanistic Approach to Coaching	11
1.2.3 Leadership Perspectives That Are Consistent with an Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach	17
1.2.3.1 Emphasis on Mastery Versus Outcome	18
1.2.3.2 The Psychological Contract	19
1.2.3.3 Autonomy Support	20
1.2.3.4 Evocative Coaching	22
1.2.3.5 Adaptive Mentorship	23
1.2.4 Coach Emotional Abuse	25
1.2.4.1 Recommendations Targeting the Elimination of Coach Emotional Abuse	29
1.3 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	31
1.3.1 Contribution	32
CHAPTER 2	34
2.1 METHODOLOGY	34
2.1.1 The Rationale for Participatory Action Research	34
2.1.2 Participatory Action Research	36
2.1.3 The Quality of Participatory Action Research	39
2.1.4 The Research Design	41
2.1.5 Data Gathering (Semi-Structured Interviews)	44
2.1.6 Data Gathering (Participant Observation)	50
2.1.7 Data Analysis	55
2.1.8 Communication and Action	63
CHAPTER 3	66
3.1 FINDINGS	66
3.1.1 The Coaches' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching	67
3.1.1.1 The Coach Sees the Sport Experience Through the Athlete's Eyes	69
3.1.1.2 The Coach Identifies What the Athlete Needs and Communicates This to the Athlete	71

3.1.1.3 The Coach Acts in the Athlete's Best Interests	74
3.1.1.4 The Coach Develops Within the Athlete the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Himself/Herself	76
3.1.1.5 The First Practice	82
3.1.1.6 The Second Practice	86
3.1.2 Exploring the Effectiveness of an Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach.....	91
3.1.2.1 The Athletes' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching	92
3.1.2.1.1 The Coach Sees the Sport Experience Through the Athlete's Eyes	94
3.1.2.1.2 The Coach Identifies What the Athlete Needs and Communicates This to the Athlete	98
3.1.2.1.3 The Coach Acts in the Athlete's Best Interests	103
3.1.2.1.4 The Coach Develops Within the Athlete the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Himself/Herself	107
3.1.3.1 Actionable Outcome #1 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Seeing the Sport Experience Through the Athletes' Eyes.....	115
3.1.3.2 Actionable Outcome #2 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Identifying What the Athletes Needed and Communicating This to the Athletes.....	127
3.1.3.3 Actionable Outcome #3 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Acting in the Athletes' Best Interests and Developing Within the Athletes the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Themselves.....	138
3.1.3.4 Actionable Outcome #4 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Embraced the Link Between Imposing Demands and Building Connections.....	147
3.1.3.5 Actionable Outcome #5 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Reflected on What was an Appropriate Level of Demand to Impose on High Performance Athletes.....	155
3.1.3.6 Actionable Outcome #6 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Being Mindful of Not Crossing the Threshold Between Imposing Demands and Coach Emotional Abuse.....	160
3.1.3.7 Actionable Outcome #7 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Became More Athlete-Centred as a Result of the PAR Study.....	169
3.2 DISCUSSION	179
CHAPTER 4	191
4.1 SUMMARY	191
4.1.1 Limitations	199
4.1.2 Implications for Theory	204
4.1.3 Implications for Practice	206
4.1.4 Implications for Research	211
4.1.5 Concluding Remarks	215
REFERENCES	217
APPENDICES	227

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1 A Five-Phase Participatory Action Research Model	37
FIGURE 2.2 Coach Interview Data Analysis Pathway	58
FIGURE 2.3 Athlete Interview Data Analysis Pathway.....	59
FIGURE 3.1 A Six Step Journey Towards a More Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach	178
FIGURE 3.2 The Concurrent Relational Reality of Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching	189

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Interview Guide	228
APPENDIX B Participant Consent Form	233
APPENDIX C Transcript Release Form	239
APPENDIX D 2018/2019 Academy University Prep Program (Males) Skill Self-Assessment Sheet	242
APPENDIX E Foundational Information for the Academy Coaching Presentation on the Topic “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coach”	245
APPENDIX F General Themes Regarding the Coaches’ and Athletes’ Interpretations of the Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Principles	250

CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

I have been a teacher and a coach for 31 years and this reality has had a profound influence on me. My Master's thesis focused on "High School Teacher and Student Perceptions of Caring Teachers." Through that research I tried to make relational competence a centrepiece of the way I approached working with students and athletes. A quote by Haim G. Ginott, cited in Wormeli (2006), accurately captured the essence of my desired approach to both teaching and coaching.

I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom.

It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized. (p. 9)

Based on these many years of coaching, it is my observation that several factors contribute to the quality of an athlete's sporting experience. One of the most important factors is the way in which he or she is coached. The dyadic reality that is the coach-athlete relationship imbues the coach with power and, therefore, creates conditions where athletes experience vulnerability (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). How a coach manages this power is of utmost importance in terms of the athlete's well-being. Another important factor is the degree to which the athlete embraces the pursuit of excellence – either as a product of intrinsic motivation or as a product of the coaching and playing environment. I have long been

impressed with athletes who have pursued the best version of themselves and with coaches who have genuinely helped athletes in this pursuit.

In my experience, many coaching clinics provided coaches with best practice suggestions that enhanced their task-competence in terms of helping athletes pursue personal excellence. However, I have yet to experience a coaching clinic that provided coaches with best practice suggestions that enhanced their relational-competence in terms of helping athletes pursue excellence. Filling this void led me to the creation and implementation of this participatory action research study – particularly seeking the most effective way coaches, in a high performance setting, can relate to the athletes when trying to help the athletes pursue the best version of themselves.

Using participatory action research to explore the coach-athlete relationship placed me (the researcher) in the middle of the research experience. This placement was consistent with the position of McTaggart (1999) who maintained that participatory action research involved “...wisely planned, deliberately implemented, and carefully studied research and participation in changes of practice” (p. 496). Consequently, the research was a collective experience involving both myself and the participants, where all of our voices were heard in the unfolding of the study. This collective reality mandated that reflexivity – attention given to the presence of the researcher’s perspective in the research process (Pillow, 2003) – be present from the very beginning of the study.

My personal perspectives are woven into the selection and explanation of the resources that guide the study’s direction. This interweaving of subjective and objective information is

not a research weakness; but rather an acknowledgment that both the study's origin and the journey toward its culmination are significantly influenced by my personal views.

One of the fundamental principles of participatory action research is participation of the researcher in the experience of what is being researched (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Participatory action research also embraces and encourages the exchange of ideologies, values, and insights between the researcher and the researched (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The nature of this participatory action research study placed me, as the researcher, in the middle of the action, starting with the literature review.

In my experience, whether coaches' first priority is athlete development or winning, it is in coaches' best interests to have their athletes pursue the best version of themselves.

Intuitively, one can see that athletes who become the best version of themselves in their chosen sport both maximize their athletic development and the probability they will experience competitive success. In the later years of my coaching career I crystallized this perspective into three maxims that I have applied to athletes as a coach:

1. Excellence is the best version of yourself, not some external standard.
2. You are defined by your pursuit of excellence, not by your attainment of it.
3. Pursuing excellence means going for it, not just hoping it will happen.

Ultimately, my experience as a teacher and a coach led me to believe these maxims resonate with athletes and allow them to feel free to pursue the best version of themselves.

Upon entering a Ph.D. program at the University of Saskatchewan, part of my academic journey saw me seeking to uncover academic validation for my experientially and intuitively generated maxims. I knew that on the "front lines" of coaching these maxims connected with

athletes, but I felt I needed more empirical credibility to speak with greater confidence about their usefulness. Essentially, I have been trying to better understand how high performance coaches, in terms of how they relate to athletes, can most effectively help athletes pursue the best version of themselves. The literature review and research study that follows are a product of my pursuit of this understanding.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

My seeking of greater understanding of how high performance coaches can most effectively help athletes pursue their best selves, led me to academic work of people like Alan S. Waterman, Carol D. Ryff, and Carl R. Rogers. Waterman (1993) supported the philosophical conclusion of Aristotle in trumpeting the concept of eudaimonic well-being – the notion that one form of human happiness is linked to the realization of personal potentialities. Ryff (1989) categorized eudaimonic well-being into six definable components: personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. It was exciting for me to realize that people like Waterman and Ryff shed academic light on my “best version of self” maxims. Some of the work of Rogers really connected with me because it focused on the role of the person who is helping someone pursue the “best version of self.”

In the late 1950’s, Rogers (1957) began sharing his experientially-based thoughts about how someone could most effectively help other people engage in positive personal development. Rogers felt people had a natural inclination to self-actualize (Tobin, 1991). Rogers claimed that helping people on a journey of positive personal development required the creating of three core facilitative conditions: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). These facilitative conditions applied whether it

was a therapist working with a client (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005) or a teacher working with a student (Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2014). Rogers (1958) also emphasized the importance of recognizing that the person one is trying to help is in a “...process of *becoming*...” (p. 14). Rogers (1961) stated the significance of the helper not placing limits on the one being helped.

The benefits of Rogers’ approach were empirically validated through decades of research (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). For example, research has shown that empathy, unconditional positive regard, and possibly congruence are essential components of proficient psychotherapy (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). However, only in recent years has any direct application of Rogerian principles targeted the coach-athlete relationship (Nelson et al., 2014). These early initiatives sought to advocate what is called an athlete-centred approach to coaching (Nelson et al., 2014). As its name implies, this approach is athlete-centred and, among other things, seeks to generate greater autonomy and empowerment for the athlete in the learning process (Preston, 2013). Some of the benefits of the athlete-centred approach include the potential enhancement of athlete leadership and independent decision-making skills (Clarke, Smith, & Thibault, 1994).

The athlete-centred approach may not, however, necessarily resonate with high performance coaches who feel significant pressure to win. In fact, according to Jacobs et al. (2017), high performance settings have the potential to push coaches in an unhealthy direction in terms of how they treat their athletes. For example, Stirling and Kerr (2014) claimed that up to 25% of athletes in competitive sports are subjected to emotionally abusive coaching

behaviours. Stirling and Kerr (2013, 2014) also described the devastating effects coach emotional abuse can have on the athletes who are recipients of the abuse.

In my opinion, Rogers' perspective on helping people pursue positive personal development (Rogers, 1958) potentially points high performance coaches in the direction of four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: (a) The coach sees the sport experience through the eyes of the athlete (empathy), (b) The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete (congruence), (c) The coach acts in the athlete's best interests (unconditional positive regard), and (d) The coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself (a process of becoming). Adherence to these principles is the essence of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

My coaching experience, including involvement in high performance coaching, has led me to believe that Rogers' work can be effectively applied to the coach-athlete relationship in high performance settings provided the coach remains committed to the four Rogerian-based athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Adhering to these principles potentially moves high performance coaches toward teaching and challenging athletes to pursue the best version of themselves while, at the same time, being mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being.

It appears that no previous participatory action research study designed to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in a high performance setting has been conducted, and so doing so seemed a logical first and exploratory step. As mentioned earlier, high performance settings have the potential to push coaches in an unhealthy direction in terms of how they treat their athletes (Jacobs et al., 2017). Incorporating

a participatory action research approach in this type of setting was beneficial because action research has the goal of activating research participants' processing that applies a critical lens to the way they have traditionally functioned, and hopefully counteracts any mistreatment that may come to light (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

The helping emphasis of Rogers' work contributed to my motivation to explore how his findings could inform my goal of (hopefully) providing high performance coaches an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach through which they could effectively help athletes pursue the best version of themselves while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. Much of Rogers' work has been described as person-centred personality theory, and the first part of my literature review will seek to provide an overview of this theory as it relates to the high performance coach-athlete relationship.

1.2.1 Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Personality Theory as It Relates to the High Performance Coach-Athlete Relationship

As mentioned earlier, in my opinion Roger's perspective on helping people pursue positive personal development (Rogers, 1958) potentially points high performance coaches in the direction of four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: (a) The coach sees the sport experience through the eyes of the athlete (empathy), (b) The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete (congruence), (c) The coach acts in the athlete's best interests (unconditional positive regard), and (d) The coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself (a process of becoming). These four principles serve to direct the high performance coach to expect and facilitate the athlete's pursuit of his/her athletic ceiling, but also protect the athlete from potentially inappropriate coaching conduct.

To more fully understand the link between Rogers' person-centred personality theory and an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach one must grasp the basic principles of Rogers' person-centred personality theory. This mandates an overview of the rationale for the theory as well as an analysis of its component parts as they apply to the high performance coach-athlete relationship.

The main focus of Roger's work was discerning the foundational attributes of proficient person-to-person interaction as it related to developing the potential of individuals (Nelson et al., 2014). This focus is consistent with high performance coaches embracing a goal of helping their athletes pursue the best version of themselves. High performance coaches, who commit to this helping relationship with their athletes, take on the role of facilitators or helpers, while the athletes take on the role of learners. According to Rogers (1958), if any relationship is going to be helpful, it must possess characteristics different from those that are unhelpful. Rogers (1958) claimed that the differing characteristics are mainly rooted in the helping person's attitudes and the perceptions of the one being helped regarding the helper.

According to Nelson et al. (2014), the work of Rogers points the coaching world in the direction of focussing on the relationship qualities that exist as part of the facilitator and learner's collective experience. Rogers emphasized three key components of the facilitator's approach: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy (Nelson et al., 2014). Rogers maintained that if these components were present, conditions were then in place to enhance the potential development of the learner (Nelson et al., 2014). Rogers (1958) also emphasized that these components needed to be perceived by the person being helped.

Congruence involves the coach, within reason, being open and honest with the athlete about how the coach is feeling (Nelson et al., 2014). This implies that coaches are genuine in their interactions with athletes in an effort to help the athletes learn (Nelson et al., 2014). Rogers (1958) emphasized that the helpers have to be real in order to facilitate the greatest benefit for the ones they are trying to help. He said this help is generated because the congruence in the facilitator makes him/her dependable in the eyes of the learner. Rogers (1980) felt that congruence was foundational for the most beneficial communication. Rogers (1958) stated

...the most basic learning for anyone who hopes to establish any kind of helping relationship is that it is safe to be transparently real. If in a given relationship I am reasonably congruent, if no feelings relevant to the relationship are hidden either to me or the other person, then I can be almost sure that the relationship will be a helpful one. (p. 12)

In addition, Rogers claimed facilitators should seek to accept, prize, and fundamentally trust the people learning from them; something Rogers frequently called unconditional positive regard (Nelson et al., 2014). The implication of this principle for high performance coaches is seeing the inherent value in all of the athletes they work with and being willing to work with the athletes from whatever point of development the athletes are currently situated. Rogers (1958) claimed that conditional acceptance on the part of the helper stifles the opportunity for the person being helped to grow in the areas where the helper has imposed limits.

Inherent in this unconditional positive regard is the desire to act in a caring manner toward the learner. Rogers (1958) claimed that genuinely helping another requires there to be

the element of care for the other. Rogers (1980) emphasized respecting the inherent worth of the person being helped.

The demonstration of empathy is a by-product of a caring relationship. Rogers encouraged facilitators to see the learning experience through the eyes of their students in order to be sensitive to their students' perspectives (Nelson et al., 2014). Nelson et al. (2014) claimed that coaches being sensitive to the challenges their athletes face enhances the possibility of productive shared decision-making regarding how to best meet those challenges. Rogers (1978) wrote of the positive outcome in the therapist-client experience that occurs when the therapist intentionally sees things through the client's eyes and is, consequently, able to, at times, provide greater clarity and help regarding the client's experience.

As mentioned earlier, Rogers (1958) also emphasized the importance of recognizing that the person one is trying to help is in a "...process of *becoming*... (p. 14)." High performance coaches who embrace this mindset view their athletes in terms of who they are capable of becoming, not just who they currently are. Rogers (1961) stated the importance of the helper not placing limits on the one being helped and claimed

If I accept the other person as something fixed, already diagnosed and classified, already shaped by his past, then I am doing my part to confirm this limited hypothesis. If I accept him as a process of becoming, then I am doing what I can to confirm or make real his potentialities. (p. 55)

In my opinion, when one starts to envision the role of high performance coaches as that of helping their athletes pursue the best version of themselves, one starts to see the real relevance of Rogers' insights. Rogers' insights find a home in a branch of psychology known as

humanistic psychology, and they have made a significant inspirational contribution to a branch of coaching known as humanistic coaching (Falcão, Bloom, Caron, & Gilbert, 2019). The focus of humanistic coaching is on facilitating enhanced athlete personal advancement through athlete empowerment and the existence of positive coach-athlete connections (Falcão et al., 2019). Humanistic coaching shares common ground with the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles under investigation in this study. Therefore, it is important to review some of the research pointing toward the importance of a more humanistic approach to coaching.

1.2.2 Research Pointing Toward the Importance of a More Humanistic Approach to Coaching

When writing about humanistic coaching, Lyle (2002) stated “...sport has enormous potential for personal growth and development if it is centred on these aims but, by definition, performance sport does not have this essential purpose (p. 180).” Despite the tendency of high performance sport to emphasize competitive outcomes, certain humanistic athlete-centred breakthroughs have found their way into the coaching conversation.

Based on their work with expert gymnastic coaches, Côté, Salmeal, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) introduced the Coaching Model (CM) designed to capture what it means to be an effective coach. The core of the CM centres around the sport dimensions of competition, training, and organization (collectively called the coaching process). The coaching process is subject to being influenced by a variety of variables including the coach’s personal characteristics, the athlete’s personal characteristics, and the athlete’s developmental level. According to the CM, the coach takes into account these variables to form a mental model of what will work best for each particular athlete, and then applies that mental model to whatever decisions are made within the competition, training, and organization sport dimensions. The

CM is a comprehensive coaching model designed to capture what contributes to coaching effectiveness, and it acknowledges that the human element of what the coach and athlete bring to the experience (coach and athlete personal characteristics) is considered a key piece of effective coaching. The coaching effectiveness work of Côté et al., (1995) was cited, among others, by Bloom, Falcão, and Caron (2014) when discussing the reality that some high performance coaches have been able to win on the scoreboard while, at the same time, developing their athletes both as individuals and as professionals. Donoso-Morales, Bloom, and Caron (2017) acknowledged the CM as one of the models that has contributed a conceptual awareness of coaching effectiveness in terms of coaches' expertise and actions.

A humanistic dimension of coaching is also found in the work of Vallée and Bloom (2005) who sought to uncover the key coaching factors that contributed to successfully run university sport programs. Their research revealed four key coaching factors: (a) the coaches possessed successful leadership behaviours, (b) the coaches had a genuine desire to help the athletes develop as individuals, (c) the coaches were very well organized, and (d) the coaches were able to impart a vision for success that their athletes bought into. Vallée and Bloom (2005) used the CM as the framework upon which to conduct their research. When talking about the coaches' characteristics Vallée and Bloom (2005) stated:

Although the expert coaches were very knowledgeable, they never used that knowledge to overwhelm athletes, put them down, or overpower them. This was evident from the emphasis the coaches put on athlete empowerment and on imparting as much knowledge as possible to every athlete. The goal of these coaches was not to create an authoritarian environment, but one that allowed the athletes to learn, grow, and reach their potential. (p. 186)

The humanistic coaching tone of Vallée and Bloom's (2005) findings is clearly on display in this description. The individual athlete emphasis of Vallée and Bloom's (2005) findings was cited,

among others, by Becker (2013) when talking about the positive effects of athlete individualization. Becker (2013) stated, “By accommodating athletes’ individual needs, coaches can more adequately promote the positive psychological states that ultimately facilitate performance (p. 188).”

Jowett (2007) emphasized the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship with a coaching model called 3 + 1 Cs. Jowett (2007) described the coach-athlete relationship as being largely shaped by three key components: closeness, commitment, and complementarity (the 3 Cs). Closeness referred to things like the degree to which the coach and athlete respected and trusted each other. Commitment referred to the willingness of the coach and athlete to maintain their connection, while complementarity referred to the coach and athlete’s level of cooperation. The degree to which the coach and athlete were on the same page in terms of their closeness, commitment, and complementarity spoke to what Jowett (2007) called their co-orientation (the + 1C). All four components: closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation represent a heightened level of coach-athlete connection consistent with a more humanistic approach to coaching.

Lorimer and Jowett (2013) referred to the 3 + 1 Cs model (Jowett, 2007) in their attempt to, as they said, “...unravel the nature of the interdependence within the [coach-athlete] relationship (p. 323.)” Lorimer and Jowett (2013) talked about “empathic understanding” as an important indicator of the ability of coaches and athletes to understand each other, and maintained that the coach’s ability to understand the athlete was a significant component of athlete-centred coaching. Bloom, Falcão, and Caron (2014) suggested that the 3 + 1 Cs model was an effective framework through which to better understand how the coach-athlete

connection influences Olympic athlete results. They suggested that Olympians prefer coaches who address their needs as athletes and as people.

Despite increased research efforts directed toward understanding effective or good coaching, Bloom, Falcão, and Caron (2014) suggested it took until 2009 for a foundational definition to emerge. In 2009, Côté and Gilbert sought to provide the coaching world with what they called “...an integrated definition of coaching effectiveness (p. 316).” Rooting themselves in the literature on positive psychology, athlete development, teaching, and coaching they provided the following definition of effective coaching: “The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts (p. 316).”. Two humanistic features of this definition are readily apparent. Firstly, the goal of an effective coach is to develop the whole athlete – competence, confidence, connection, and character speak to pursuing excellence in sport and life. Secondly, the knowledge a coach brings to the experience is not just of a tactical or technical nature. There is a significant human component to what the coach brings to the experience in the form of interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge. Côté and Gilbert (2009) described interpersonal knowledge as referring to a person’s ability to form positive connections with other individuals, and intrapersonal knowledge as a person’s ability to be reflective and open to self-improvement. They pointed out the fact that the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal coaching knowledge doesn’t receive a lot of emphasis in both the recruitment or education of coaches. Both, however, play an important role in the humanistic goal of trying to facilitate someone’s pursuit of their best self. Falcão, Bloom, Caron, and Gilbert (2019) echoed this emphasis on athlete

development when they brought attention to the point Côté and Gilbert (2009) made about the importance of youth sport coaches facilitating balanced athlete development – both in sport and in life.

Bennie and O'Connor (2010) pointed to the coaching effectiveness definition of Côté and Gilbert (2009) as being supportive of a humanistic coaching approach. Bennie and O'Connor (2010) were curious about the viability of a humanistic coaching approach in professional sport as they sought to better understand, from both a coach and athlete perspective, the coaching philosophies of coaches within the realm of professional cricket and rugby in Australia. What they found was a willingness of the coaches to prioritize individual athlete development. Both the coaches and athletes involved in the study felt that prioritizing athlete and team development would ultimately lead to more competitive success. In fact, the coaches in this study did not emphasize competitive success as an indispensable indicator of coaching effectiveness, and several athletes in the study said that a winning-focused emphasis was not a productive component of a coaching philosophy in a professional context. Though it is fair to say that these perspectives are perhaps not universally shared by high performance coaches and athletes, the findings of Bennie and O'Connor's (2010) study pointed to the potential for a more humanistic approach to coaching being viable within the professional sport experience.

The research of Bennie and O'Connor (2010) targeted the professional sport world. Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016) explored both professional and Olympic sport. They investigated what they called "serial winning" professional and Olympic coaches to try and better understand the realities of these coaches. They discovered that these highly successful high

performance coaches had, as one of their core values, an athlete-centred mindset. To be athlete-centred did not mean these coaches continually functioned through a lens of positivity and benevolence. Rather, Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016) described the approach of these coaches in the following way:

SWC [serial winning coaches] invest time developing athletes' confidence in their own ability and the motivation to continue to strive to improve and win. This does not typically rely on kindness and positive reinforcement alone, but more in striking an optimal balance between challenge and support that stimulates athlete growth. (p. 15)

According to Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016), serial winning coaches, in addition to genuinely caring for the athletes, demonstrated a willingness to convey confidence in the athletes' abilities (particularly before competitive experiences), to be more process-oriented, to bring the athletes into the decision-making process, and to help the athletes develop heightened levels of personal proficiency in the areas of leadership, self-awareness, and self-reliance. Though not every serial winning coach in Lara-Bercial and Mallet's (2016) research conveyed all of these qualities, and serial winning coaches maintained and accessed final decision-making power, all of the above-mentioned coaching points of emphasis function in harmony with a more humanistic approach to coaching. Falcão et al. (2019) acknowledged that the research efforts of Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016), as well as Bennie and O'Connor (2010), addressed humanistic principles.

Despite the important contributions of researchers like Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016) and Bennie and O'Connor (2010), Falcão, Bloom, and Bennie (2017) claimed that research seeking greater understanding of how coaches both perceive and apply a humanistic coaching approach is still uncommon. To address this concern, Falcão, Bloom, and Bennie (2017)

conducted a research study that (a) facilitated coach exposure to a humanistic coaching workshop, and (b) tracked the coaches' experiences of both the workshop, and their efforts to apply humanistic coaching principles with their own youth sport athletes. According to Falcão, Bloom, and Bennie (2017), the research findings suggested that the coaches were "...successfully taught...about humanistic coaching and provided with...tools to apply their knowledge in youth sport settings (p. 287)." In addition, the research findings suggested that the coaches found their intentional humanistic focus to be positive and a source of favourable outcomes for the athletes. For example, the coaches felt their intentional humanistic approach (e.g., encouraging athlete input; regularly communicating with athletes about both sport and non-sport related topics to enhance their connection with the athletes) contributed to athlete gains in the areas of communication, desire, autonomy, and an openness to assist fellow team members.

Falcão, Bloom, and Bennie (2017) suggested that a humanistic approach to coaching may, in fact, represent a philosophy that underlies principles that guide the transformational leadership, mastery-oriented, and autonomy-supportive approaches to coaching. One could make the case that a humanistic approach to coaching, and the insights of Rogers that lie within it, also function in harmony with a number of empirically-validated leadership perspectives designed to enhance a leader's ability to maximize the follower's experience. A look at five of these leadership perspectives will be discussed in the third part of the literature review.

1.2.3 Leadership Perspectives That Are Consistent with an Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach

The dyadic reality that is the coach-athlete relationship imbues the coach with power and, therefore, creates conditions where athletes experience vulnerability (Stirling & Kerr,

2009). Essentially, the high performance coach is the leader and the athlete is the follower. If high performance coaches as leaders are going to manage this power in an athlete-centred way it is suggested they become aware of the following five leadership perspectives: Emphasis on Mastery Versus Outcome, The Psychological Contract, Autonomy Support, Evocative Coaching, and Adaptive Mentorship.

1.2.3.1 Emphasis on Mastery Versus Outcome

Athlete-centred high performance coaches should be cognizant of their goal emphasis and the potential impact of that emphasis on the athletes they are coaching. An “outcome” goal emphasis sees the athletes viewed by the coach more as a means to an end. A “mastery” goal emphasis sees the athletes viewed by the coach more as an end unto themselves. Two mainstream models seeking to describe the coach as leader provide differing degrees of emphasis with respect to mastery or outcome goals. Chelladurai’s (2011) Multidimensional Model of Leadership, while identifying the appropriate context for a mastery goal emphasis, also endorsed a significant outcome goal emphasis by proposing that a quest for excellence inherently involves winning, and that, therefore, a coach should accentuate winning and performance. Smoll and Smith’s (2008) coaching leadership model trumpeted a mastery goal emphasis. In discussing their perspective, Smoll and Smith (2008) stated

...athletes come first in a mastery-oriented climate created by competent and caring leadership, COACHES NEVER LOSE the most important contest of all: the challenge of providing a sport experience that contributes to the personal and athletic development of the youngsters who have been entrusted to them. (p. 1)

Both Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership and Smoll and Smith's behaviour-oriented model claim that coaching behaviours are influenced by three primary variables: the coach's characteristics, the athlete's characteristics, and situational factors (Nichols, 2015). Multiple influencing variables mean that, in either model, the coach as leader will not always act exactly the same. However, the coach as leader may have a preferential emphasis: either "outcome," or "mastery."

Based on my experience, coaches of high school aged athletes, whether more mastery goal focused or outcome goal focused, do have one thing in common, a more heroic approach to leadership. This leadership perspective, as described in Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, and Taylor (2011), embraces an individualistic style of leadership, meaning the power of leadership is in the hands of select individuals. Some people view the heroic approach to leadership as narrow-minded because it gives only select individuals the tasks and benefits of leadership (Bolden et al., 2011). However, because of the non-adult status of their athletes, coaches of high school aged athletes are legally required to act in the place or role of a parent when coaching their athletes. The legal requirements placed upon them, coupled with the youthful age of their athletes, means coaches of high school aged athletes must act in a more paternalistic manner, thus adopting the more heroic approach to leadership. Whether more mastery goal focused or outcome goal focused, the coaches of high school aged athletes are, as individuals, legally and morally responsible to provide effective leadership for their athletes.

1.2.3.2 The Psychological Contract

Athlete-centred high performance coaches should understand what a psychological contract is. The term "psychological contract" seeks to raise the awareness of leaders to the

implicit expectations that exist in any leader-follower scenario, with the leader-follower scenarios viewed as exchange relationships and the psychological contract referring to the expectations that both the leader and follower have in the relationship (Propp, 2004).

Research suggests that there are benefits to appropriate psychological contracts being developed between coaches and athletes (Jackson, Grove, & Beauchamp, 2010; Rezaia & Gurney, 2016). For example, Rezaia and Gurney (2016) claimed that coach-athlete psychological contracts have the potential to provide a foundation for athlete role-behavior and desire.

Jackson et al. (2010) claimed that both athletes and coaches will be more committed if they have confidence in each other. Rezaia and Gurney (2016) reinforced this claim by stating one can anticipate that student-athletes who know and embrace what their coaches bring to the team (e.g., values) will, as a means of reciprocation, tend to exhibit a greater work ethic and productivity. Rezaia and Gurney (2016) also stated that the likelihood athletes are motivated, satisfied, and committed to giving extra effort is at its highest when the athletes feel the psychological contract with their coach has been honored.

1.2.3.3 Autonomy Support

Athlete-centred high performance coaches should consider the concept of autonomy support in their decision-making regarding how to treat their athletes. In terms of interpersonal dynamics, the concept of autonomy support refers to the degree to which an interpersonal experience reinforces autonomy or regulates behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Deci and Ryan (1987) found that the greater the level of autonomy support experienced by

individuals, the more likely they were to experience, among other things, heightened levels of intrinsic motivation and interest in what they were doing.

Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, and Briere (2001) connected autonomy support and self-determination theory. With respect to self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) stated “...research guided by self-determination theory has focused on the social-contextual conditions that facilitate versus forestall the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development” (p. 68). According to self-determination theory, the more autonomy supportive the social context individuals find themselves in is, the more likely they are to embrace an intrinsically-motivated mindset within that social context (Pelletier et al., 2001).

The consideration of autonomy support has significant implications for the approaches high performance coaches take with athletes. If high performance coaches embrace a strictly outcome goal approach, they may be more inclined, for efficiency purposes, to use a more controlling coaching style when developing skills and sport intelligence in their athletes. Though these coaches might be more efficient, they may, at the same time, erode the athletes’ desire for the sport and diminish the probability the athletes will continue to participate in the sport.

If high performance coaches embrace a mastery goal approach, their primary concern is not how quickly the athletes achieve mastery but that the athletes continue to pursue mastery. One knows intuitively that athletes are more likely to stay involved in activities they enjoy, and research has shown that the mastery goal approach decreases the anxiety experienced by athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). In my opinion, advocates of autonomy support

would suggest a mastery goal approach as a way to keep athletes more engaged and committed to personal development. Hocine and Zhang (2014) commented on the employee benefits of greater autonomy support in a workplace environment. They claimed research has shown a link between worker autonomy support and heightened levels of worker engagement and contentment with their job.

1.2.3.4 Evocative Coaching

Athlete-centred high performance coaches should consider the benefits of evocative coaching. Evocative coaching is an approach to coaching that embraces an other-oriented perspective (Dewar, 2012). In the sport context, evocative coaching implies that coaches see the sporting experience through their athletes' eyes and try to help their athletes pursue the best version of themselves. Evocative coaching has as one of its guiding principles "You cannot teach a person anything. You can only help him find it within himself" (Dewar, 2012, p. 1).

Davis and Jowett (2014) stated that ideal athletic performance is preceded by a coach-athlete connection exemplary in its interdependence. They pointed to this coach-athlete interdependence as a key component of productive coaching. Research has shown that highly capable coaches not only help build athletes' skills, but also spend a large amount of time working with athletes to elevate the athletes' levels of self-confidence, maturity, and ownership of the learning process (Kao & Tsai, 2016). Bartholomaeus (2012) stated that as the athlete's comfort level with the coach increases, it becomes easier for the athlete to help the team in positive ways and be task-focussed.

How receptive high performance coaches will be to the idea of evocative coaching is likely to be dependent on their goal orientation. More outcome goal-focused coaches are likely

to be hesitant to make athlete-first decisions that may compromise the team's immediate outcome goals (e.g., allocating extra practice time to a player who is struggling with a skill, but is not a starter). Alternatively, more mastery goal-focused coaches will resonate with the "meeting the athlete where he/she is currently at" perspective that is so much a part of the evocative coaching approach. It makes no sense, from a mastery goal perspective, to try and teach a baby to run if he/she has not yet learned how to walk.

1.2.3.5 Adaptive Mentorship

When athlete-centred high performance coaches, using communication and observation, assess the needs of their athletes and make coaching decisions to best meet those needs, they are acting in harmony with an adaptive mentorship approach to leadership. Adaptive mentorship is a leadership model developed by Ralph and Walker (2011) that helps mentors tailor their interaction with mentees according to the developmental reality of the mentees. Ralph and Walker's (2011) model is intended to guide "...mentors in adjusting their mentorship response to appropriately match the task-specific developmental level of proteges whom they are assisting in the learning/work situation" (p. 294).

Ralph and Walker (2011) described mentoring as a process involving mentors who encourage and help mentees to ponder how their previous experiences merge with their current insights in order to lead them toward either new possibilities or an analysis of their current workplace and life realities. Acting in this way requires that high performance coaches view their athletes as people and not just resources or objects of work.

High performance coaches viewing their athletes as people corresponds with a core principle of Ralph and Walker's (2011) Adaptive Mentorship approach. Ralph and Walker

(2011) stated “...supporting the life journeying of mentees is imperative. Effective mentors will reflect the healthy view that mentees are whole persons, not merely means or functionaries to some ends” (p. 279). This Adaptive Mentorship core principle seems to resonate with the mastery goal coaching emphasis of Smoll and Smith (2008) that prioritizes both the athletic and personal development of the athletes the coach is working with. This intentional focus on the holistic experience of the athlete also resonates with Rogerian principles.

In fact, all of the previously mentioned leadership perspectives connect in some way with either the rationale for, or the component parts of, the facilitative environment Rogers described in his person-centred personality theory. This connection may involve a focus on leaders being congruent, positive in nature, or empathetic, or simply a prioritizing of helping followers achieve their potential. Consequently, all of these leadership perspectives (Emphasis on Mastery Versus Outcome, The Psychological Contract, Autonomy Support, Evocative Coaching, Adaptive Mentorship) provide additional relevant data for the purposes of defining what it means to be an athlete-centred high performance coach.

The key question for the athlete-centred high performance coach is: “In terms of how I relate to my athletes, how do I most effectively help my athletes pursue the best version of themselves?” The implication of Rogers’ work, with the confluence of support from the previously-mentioned coaching and leadership perspectives, is that high performance coaches who commit to helping their athletes pursue the best version of themselves are arguably best served by embracing a mindset characterized by congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy when interacting with their athletes, coupled with the recognition that their athletes are never a finished product, but always in a state of becoming. This is what it means to be an

athlete-centred high performance coach: the coach sees the sport experience through the eyes of the athlete (empathy); the coach identifies the needs of the athlete and communicates this to the athlete (congruence); the coach acts in the athlete's best interests (unconditional positive regard); and the coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself (a process of becoming).

Embracing an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach potentially enables high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. Athlete psychological well-being is the focus of the next section. Coach emotional abuse has been identified as a concern in sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2008a), and an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach has the potential to counteract it.

1.2.4 Coach Emotional Abuse

The exciting potential reality that accompanies an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is that not only is it arguably the most effective way for coaches to help athletes pursue the best version of themselves, but it also decreases the probability that coaches will act in an inappropriate manner. High performance coaches who coach in an athlete-centred high performance way teach their athletes and challenge their athletes to pursue their athletic ceilings, but do so in a manner that is mindful of their athletes' physical and psychological well-being.

With reference to athlete psychological well-being, though coach emotional abuse was not the primary focus of this study, its minimization is definitely a potential benefit of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. My personal experience of coach

emotional abuse, as an athlete and the parent of an athlete, has also contributed to my motivation to research an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

When I was in Junior High School in Toronto, Ontario I excitedly looked forward to my first year of competitive tackle football. I was in Grade 8, having never before played organized football, and headed off to practice with the positive energy of someone who was going to begin participating in something he had only watched his heroes play on television.

It didn't take too long for the first hitting drill to commence. We participated in a drill known as "the Gauntlet" which basically required two players to lie down on their backs, facing in opposite directions, and then upon hearing the coach's whistle, jump up, turn around and smash into each other. I was big for my age but had received no prior training in the technique of tackling, so something like leverage was a relatively foreign concept. In the drill I was partnered with a similar aged boy (about two-thirds my size) who, if my memory is accurate, had moved to Toronto from the United States (where he had already played football for a number of seasons). Our collision was no contest as he effectively used power and leverage to knock me on my back.

As I was lying on my back, processing the distressful outcome of the collision, I encountered my first acute experience of emotional abuse by a coach. The assistant coach leaned down and, staring into my facemask, said "You're the worst goddamn excuse for a football player that I have ever seen!" Even though that event occurred approximately 40 years ago, I could still probably draw you a fairly accurate picture of that man's face. Unfortunately, that event set the stage for a season where coach emotional abuse was part of the experience.

On a psychological level, the season was very distressing. I won't share any more details but we won the league championship because I think we were afraid to lose. Perhaps from the outside, people looked at the season as a success because of the championship. In terms of psychological well-being, the season was devastating and I wanted to quit football, a sport I had loved since I could remember.

Unfortunately, my experience is one of perhaps thousands that occur where coaches, in their pursuit of competitive glory, feel it is justified to emotionally abuse their athletes. They point to the positive scoreboard impact of their actions as a means of justification. An analogy I like to use to explain their justification is that of a dog chasing a cat. The coach is the dog and the athlete is the cat. The dog may be capable of efficiently making the cat run very fast but doesn't consider the impact of this approach on the quality of life for the cat. Eventually, the cat doesn't want to go outside anymore...and definitely doesn't want anything to do with the dog!

To coach differently was a goal of mine. I was certainly far from perfect, but more often than not I tried to make the experience of sport positive and affirming for the athletes while at the same time teaching and challenging them to pursue the best version of themselves. On the won-loss front I probably finished my coaching career around .500 with a couple of junior championships. On the human impact front, I hope I finished well over .900 in terms of athletes' feelings of positive self-worth. I passionately believe that you can teach and challenge athletes to pursue being all they can be while being mindful of their physical and psychological well-being.

This passion is not just fueled by my experience as a boy. They say that choosing to have children is choosing to have your heart run around outside your body for the rest of your life. My wife and I have three wonderful children – all three boys. All the boys were active as children and continue to be active as young adults. They loved and love to participate in athletic pursuits and a couple of them have played sport at the highest levels in the country for their age group. Sadly, one of our boys experienced emotional abuse at the hands of a coach in a manner similar to my childhood experience. Though he was very accomplished as an athlete it left him wanting to quit the game he loved, and also resulted in some mental health challenges that he is fortunately currently in the process of resolving.

I experienced coach emotional abuse as a young athlete, and many years later I had to watch and help one of my children struggle with the experience of being on the receiving end of coach emotional abuse. We must find a way for athletes to be free to pursue the best version of themselves while having their physical and psychological well-being acknowledged and valued.

The next section of the literature review looks at recommendations that target the elimination of coach emotional abuse. These recommendations harmonize in a significant way with an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Consequently, the recommendations that follow provide further rationale for the need to more fully understand what it means to embrace an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

1.2.4.1 Recommendations Targeting the Elimination of Coach Emotional Abuse

Ashley Stirling and Gretchen Kerr have played a prominent role in researching the area of coach emotional abuse. Based on their research with emotionally abused athletes, Stirling and Kerr (2008a) provided the first comprehensive definition of emotional abuse in the context of the sport environment. They claimed emotional abuse was as follows

A pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful. Acts of emotional abuse include physical behaviours, verbal behaviours, and acts of denying attention and support. These acts have the potential to be spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, or deny emotional responsiveness, and may be harmful to an individual's affective, behavioural, cognitive or physical well-being. (p. 178)

Gervis and Dunn (2004) recommended that research was needed to target approaches to coaching that protect children from abuse. Stirling and Kerr (2013), in their advocacy for non-emotionally abusive coaching approaches, claimed that ideal athlete proficiency and sustained athlete well-being are attained more efficiently if the athlete is emotionally stable, self-supporting, and free to practice and play in a non-emotionally abusive environment. Stirling and Kerr (2013) also stated that the impact of non-abusive coaching approaches needs to be explored particularly where those approaches have produced high performance sport success.

Kavanagh, Brown, and Jones (2017) suggested looking at ways of making coaching more athlete-centred to give the athletes a greater voice and more autonomy. They were also in favor of coaching approaches that focus more on the holistic development of the athlete as a

way of reducing the risk of the athlete being emotionally abused. In addition, Kavanagh et al. (2017) wanted individual coaching behaviours targeted by researchers. They said research going forward should analyze both coaching skills and the ability of coaches to emotionally regulate in competitive environments.

Providing alternative coaching approaches that are arguably considered best practice, not just in terms of protecting athletes from emotional abuse but also in terms of helping athletes improve, will potentially resonate more with existing coaches. Brackenridge, Bringer, and Bishopp (2005) claimed the coaches they worked with were significantly more receptive to child protection rationale that emphasized continual improvement and best coaching practice, as opposed to a perceived emphasis on coaching surveillance.

Owusu-Sekyere and Gervis (2016) linked the desire of coaches to develop mental toughness in athletes as contributing to emotionally abusive coaching practices. They suggested that most coaches do not know what mental skills actually make up mental toughness and are thus not properly positioned to develop it appropriately. This reality mandates targeted coach education initiatives looking at what athlete mental toughness is and how this toughness might be properly and proficiently developed, in such a way as to not place athletes in emotionally abusive circumstances.

Stirling (2013) claimed that because some coaches are influenced to become emotionally abusive due to the modelling of other emotionally-abusive coaches, it is important for coaches to be intentionally exposed to coaching role models who have had competitive success while using a non-emotionally abusive approach to coaching. Stirling (2013) also suggested that giving coaches access to workshops that advocate positive approaches to the

development of athletes is one practical way of aiding the development of more positive coaches. Stirling and Kerr (2014) encouraged the establishment of coaching social networks where coaches can connect, in person or through various discussion channels, with other coaches who are pursuing a non-abusive approach to coaching.

To reduce the risk of coach emotional abuse, Stirling and Kerr (2014) felt it was important for coaches to learn how to be realistic in their expectations for athletic performance and to be open in their communication with their athletes. Stirling and Kerr (2014) also suggested coaches should possibly give more power to the athletes. This could involve, among other things, including the athletes, when feasible, in the coaches' decision-making process. Stirling and Kerr (2014) felt that an increased decision making role for the athletes, coupled with open coach-athlete communication, would have a positive effect on the level of respect the coach and athletes have for each other. This recommendation, along with many of the other recommendations for countering coach emotional abuse, shares some common ground with the principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching and further validates the importance of developing a deeper understanding of what it means to use an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

1.3 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A participatory action research study designed to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being, seemed a logical and first exploratory step, and was the purpose of this research. This initial participatory action research study targeted male coaches working

with male athletes. The academic reasoning for this initial targeting was rooted in the research of Pratt and Eitzen (1989), who found that male coaches coaching teams of male athletes were continually more demanding, autocratic, and traditional than male coaches coaching teams of female athletes. In addition, Tibbert, Andersen, and Morris (2015) claimed

In some sports, coaches endorse the hyper-masculine subculture typified by slogans, such as no-pain-no-gain, rest-is-for-the-dead, and man up, and potentially create environments of risk and threat instead of promoting positive self-care and self-awareness. (p. 69)

Coaching male athletes seems to move male coaches toward embracing a more autocratic and demanding leadership style (Pratt & Eitzen, 1989), and though not inappropriate in and of itself, embracing this leadership style possibly presents these coaches with greater challenges in attempting to adopt an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach (e.g., the challenge of intentionally seeing the sport experience through the athletes' eyes).

1.3.1 Contribution

A high performance sports model, as commonly constructed, highlights the performance excellence of athletes, with priorities being the development and backing of elite athletes, and, according to high performance coaches, winning in competition (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). Essentially, the distinguishing characteristics of high performance sport are, in training, the pursuit of athletic excellence both individually and collectively, and, in competition, the pursuit of the win.

One of the challenges of the high performance sports model is that coaches feel their credibility, and perhaps job security, is directly tied to winning (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). This

reality places significant pressure on high performance coaches. In fact, as previously mentioned, high performance sport has the potential to push coaches in an unhealthy direction in terms of how they treat their athletes (Jacobs et al., 2017).

Providing high performance coaches with an empirically validated athlete-centred high performance coaching approach makes an important contribution to high performance sport. It provides high performance coaches with a road map through which they can most effectively help athletes pursue their best selves, which will maximize the probability of competitive success, while at the same time remaining mindful of athlete physical and psychological well-being.

To my knowledge, this participatory action research study was the first attempt to directly apply specific Rogerian-inspired athlete-centred coaching principles, on a continuous basis, in a high performance sport setting. The findings that emerged from this study, along with the endorsement of both the athletes and the coaches, pointed to the possibility that an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is both achievable and effective.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 METHODOLOGY

The research question posed for this study emanated directly from the study's purpose:
How effective is an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being?

2.1.1 The Rationale for Participatory Action Research

To most effectively answer the research question required direct input from people who had experienced athlete-centred high performance coaching, as coaches or athletes, as well as specific action that emanated, in part, from that input. This input and action could only be comprehensively generated if myself and the coaches and athletes were all embedded in the process. This embedded reality is fundamental to participatory action research (PAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR is considered to be "...a subset of action research..." (MacDonald, 2012, p. 35), emanating from the same historical roots and principles. Therefore, in this dissertation the terms participatory action research and action research are used interchangeably.

To a certain extent, the development of PAR occurred because of uncertainty with the postpositivistic exclusion of research participants as active players in knowledge production (Kowalski, McHugh, Sabiston, & Ferguson, 2018). According to MacDonald (2012), PAR finds its roots in the work of Kurt Lewin and Paolo Freire. In the 1940's Lewin introduced the name 'action research' to describe the parallel process of examining a social system while trying to make changes to it (Gillis & Jackson, 2002). Freire (1970) spoke out against the dehumanization

of people and called for education to be more than just a medium through which those in power controlled the experience.

As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental principles of PAR is participation of the researcher in the experience of what is being researched including the exchange of ideologies, values, and insights between the researcher and the researched (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In addition to being participatory, collaborative, and practical, other distinguishing features of PAR include being reflexive, critical, emancipatory, a social process, and a potential transformer of practice and theory (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The goal of action research is to seek solutions to areas of concern by working directly with the people attached to the targeted areas (Bargal, 2008).

In order to better understand an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in a high performance setting, from both a coach and athlete perspective, it was helpful for me to work with a sport academy that had the combination of high performance goals, an interest in athlete-centred coaching, and a willingness to participate in this study. As mentioned earlier, high performance settings have the potential to push coaches in an unhealthy direction in terms of how they treat their athletes (Jacobs et al., 2017). Consequently, Incorporating a PAR approach into a high performance sport academy setting was beneficial because action research has the goal of elevating research participants' awareness regarding potential problems in their traditional handling of current situations, and hopefully counteracts any mistreatment that may come to light (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

In support of action research, Stringer (1996) pointed out the challenge of researching in a non-action research way where the researcher is not deeply connected to the ones being

researched. Stringer (1996) claimed that if a researcher is not connected to the research participants, the researcher can generate engaging theoretical views regarding social practices, but falls short of connecting with the everyday experiences of the research participants. In contrast, PAR sees the researcher actively involved in the research experience through “...theoretically informed participation” (McTaggart, 1999, p. 496).

2.1.2 Participatory Action Research

PAR creates partnerships for the purpose of “[exploring]...transformative possibilities” (Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoeber, 2005, p. 370). Though PAR is uniquely placed as a research methodology, it openly shares principles associated with a qualitative research-friendly constructivist paradigm when it comes to investigating the meaning of lived experiences. In fact, MacDonald (2012) described PAR as “...a qualitative research methodology that fosters collaboration among participants and researchers” (p. 46). Genuinely understanding the meaning research participants give to their experiences requires that researchers recognize meanings are both diverse and multiple in nature, thus directing the researchers to investigate a complexity of perspectives as opposed to more isolated ideas and categories (Creswell, 2014).

PAR can embrace more flexibility (Kowalski, et al., 2018) in the form of the action research spiral – a research approach characterized by planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and then based on the reflecting, a continuous repeating of the cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR can also embrace more structure (Kowalski, et al., 2018) in the form of the five-phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004). The five-phase PAR model (see Figure 2.1) starts with an initial research design, and progresses through data gathering, data analysis, communication, and action. It served as the model for this research study.

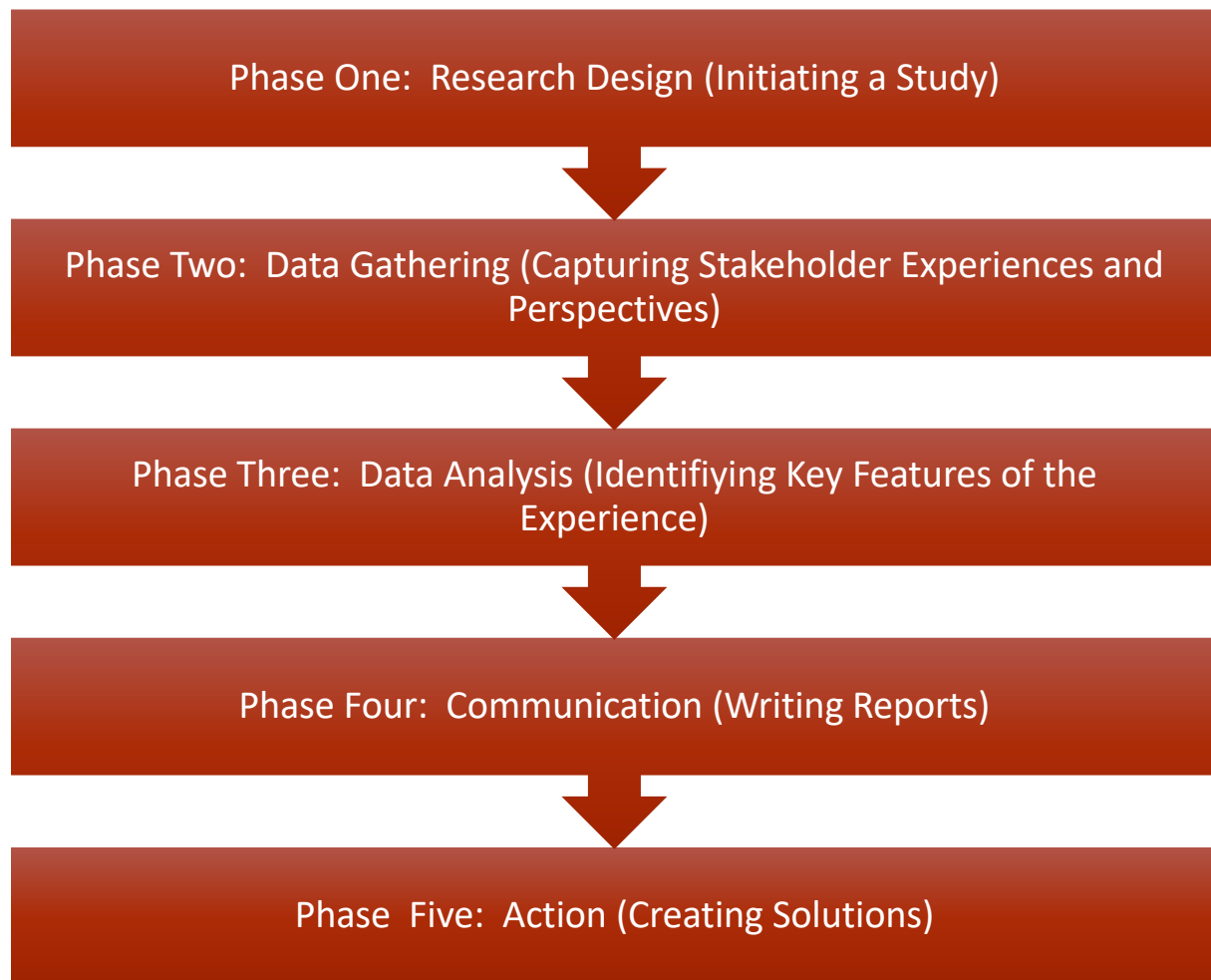


Figure 2.1 A Five-Phase Participatory Action Research Model (Stringer & Genat, 2004)

The more structured approach to PAR was advantageous for this particular research experience. The logical flow of the Five-Phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) allowed for a greater degree of structured planning and predictability with respect to research decisions. This research experience was fluid in nature with an unpredictable competitive schedule (due to no academy league) and a frequently changing training group (younger athletes were often called up to train with the older training group). Amid this dynamic reality, knowing that approximately every two weeks athlete and coach biweekly meetings would occur where

frequently data would be generated and action planned, gave the research a more settled feel. PAR is iterative in nature (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2010), and this research experience saw a cycling through of the data generation, data analysis, communication, and action phases occur numerous times – all with the hope of gaining a clearer understanding of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) claimed that the benefits of PAR are the tangible changes in the actions, interactions, values, and understandings of people. My PAR study sought to generate those changes through iterations of the five-phase PAR model with data gathering, data analysis, and communication preceding direct action in the exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

One of the unique components of PAR is that it not only situates the researcher and participants as engaging in research together, but it may generate tangible outcomes that benefit the participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2018; Robertson, 2000). These tangible outcomes may occur at the end of a PAR process but they may also materialize throughout the process. Discussed at length in Chapter 3, the actionable outcomes of my research occurred throughout the exploration stage of the study. The actionable outcomes occurred as feedback from the athletes and coaches, combined with input from me as the researcher, informed a continuous exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The actionable outcomes were the result of specific action plans embraced by the coaches. The degree to which these actionable outcomes changed coaching perspectives will dictate the study's long-term sustainability.

PAR was an appropriate vehicle through which to explore an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach because it involved the pursuit of understanding through

action, to change the interaction experiences of a particular social environment (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). McNiff (2001) claimed that action research is internationally recognized as a strong medium for learning. If one views coaches as responsible, in part, for the teaching of knowledge, skills, and values, the successful presence of action research in the world of education (Robertson, 2000) also makes it an enticing option in exploring the work of coaches.

2.1.3 The Quality of Participatory Action Research

It is important to note that frequently PAR is considered the initial step (Gibbon, 2002) in the development of a research path, and the validity of PAR is not determined by the same standards as quantitative research (McTaggart, 1998). McTaggart (1998) stated

The dominant discourse of validity hinges upon the combination of two key quests: the quest for generalisation, and the quest for causality...Implicit in both quests is an aspiration for replicability, prediction and control which transcends time...Neither the quest for this version of generalisation, nor the quest for this version of causality are key commitments of participatory action researchers, and accordingly the dominant version of validity is of little interest to adherents of this approach to enquiry and practice. (p. 212)

Though it is inaccurate to state that the findings of a PAR study will be generalizable, it is accurate to state that the findings have the potential to be transferable. This means that the findings should have applicability to other people in similar contexts. Transferability is a measure of a study's trustworthiness and one way of increasing its likelihood is to provide significantly detailed descriptions throughout the study (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). These descriptions enable readers to compare the experiences of the groups and individuals in the

study with themselves, or other people, or other research (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). The detailed descriptions of this study are found in Chapter 3.

McTaggart (1998) suggested that the validity of a PAR study is in part determined by the degree to which it accomplishes its goals – the actionable outcomes. PAR seeks to facilitate change within the context of the collective action of the researcher and participants. The way things change, because of the collective relationship and work of the researcher and research participants, is what should be focussed on and reported (McTaggart, 1998). The study's actionable outcomes are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Schinke, Smith, and McGannon (2013) talked about evaluating the quality of action research in terms of its impact on the community where the action took place. They used the term “characterising traits” to describe their evaluative criteria and emphasized that these are only some of the criteria applicable for assessing research in a particular community. Their criteria for quality community research included: research that is community driven, research that involves prolonged engagement and consultation, and research that produces project deliverables and project sustainability. My PAR study met the demands of all of the above-mentioned criteria.

PAR is not limited to one strategic plan (Kowalski et al., 2018), and this reality makes evaluating the quality of PAR somewhat difficult. However, certain fundamental measures for ensuring trustworthiness in all forms of qualitative research apply to PAR projects. Curtin and Fossey (2007) highlighted six criteria by which the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be measured: reflexivity, transferability, researcher/participant collaboration, member-checking, triangulation, and descriptions that are thick in nature. Kowalski et al., (2018) talked

about the importance of a peer debrief component to enhance qualitative research trustworthiness. McHugh (2008) contributed another trustworthiness criterion by addressing the importance of the researcher being in the research field for a long period of time and engaging in continuous observation. This PAR study met all of these trustworthiness requirements, and further commentary on establishing trustworthiness will be provided as part of a detailed description of the study's method. The study's method will be presented in a manner consistent with the five-phase PAR model (research design, data gathering, data analysis, communication, action) (Stringer & Genat, 2004).

2.1.4 The Research Design

In order to better understand an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in a high performance setting, from both a coach and athlete perspective, it was helpful for me to work, in a participatory action way, with a sport academy that had the combination of high performance goals, an interest in athlete-centred coaching, and a willingness to participate in this study. A local high performance sport academy met these criteria and was consequently well-suited for this research approach. The academy fielded male and female teams in a variety of age groups and offered training sessions and competitions for these groups throughout the year – in both an outdoor and an indoor season. My research work was conducted with the academy's oldest group of male athletes (16 to 18 years of age) and their coaches during the 2018/2019 indoor season. The coaches were paid for their services (a part-time wage) and the oldest group of male athletes was specifically designated as a university preparation group. The academy was public about its goals to help the young men in this training group obtain college and university playing opportunities. The 16 to 18 years old male training group did not play in

an academy league because population realities made it impossible to create enough academy teams to form a league. The training group did, however, compete in a number of exhibition games against a cross-section of opponents – including club teams and other academy teams.

The academy offered its services in the sport of soccer. The actual sport offering has been intentionally de-emphasized in my academy description to try and help protect the confidentiality of the research participants. Attempting to safeguard the confidentiality of the research participants was part of the entire research experience. There are times, when out of logistical necessity the sport is mentioned in the dissertation. However, in addition to trying to protect participant confidentiality, the intent of the research is to focus on the high performance nature of this particular academy group and not the actual sport they are playing. The universal appeal of soccer was certainly evident in the demographic make-up of the athletes I researched. They came from a variety of cultural and socio-economic environments. Of particular note was the academy's intentionality in trying to provide financial assistance to any participants in need, so that their passion for and pursuit of excellence in soccer would not be curbed by limited financial realities.

Though I initially envisioned my work with the academy involving both an exploration and refinement of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, in reality I only implemented the exploration stage. Exploration was the natural first step and organically became the all-encompassing goal once the indoor season began. When working with the academy I delimited the scope of my study to the coaches and athletes. I made the decision to not include the athletes' parents in the research in order to shine the research spotlight squarely on the coach-athlete connection. Without question, parents play an integral role in

the high performance sport experience of athletes (Gould, Laver, Rolu, Jannes, & Penninsi, 2006). However, their role did not fall within the mandate of this study's purpose (to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being).

With the exception of meeting with the coaches before and after the indoor season, I delimited the scope of my study to the academy's traditional indoor season (November to March). The season in which this study took place was unique, in the sense that some of the younger academy athletes had the opportunity to train for and participate in a showcase event in April. However, more than a third of the athletes who had provided personal interview informed consent were no longer eligible to compete in the April competition. Their official role with the academy ended at the end of March. The April group of academy athletes also included athletes who had not been part of any of the November to March indoor season. With the older athletes no longer officially part of the academy, and with new athletes now part of the academy, the April academy group was too distinct from the November to March group to be justifiably included in the study.

I met with the male head coaches of the academy's 16 to 18 years old male athletes in October, 2018, just prior to the start of the academy's indoor season. I began meeting with the athletes shortly after the indoor season began in November, 2018. The indoor season continued until April, 2019, and my research concluded with a final debriefing meeting with the head coaches in May, 2019. I participated in over 70 practices and games.

Flyvbjerg (2006) claimed that if research is a process of learning, the most effective learning occurs the closer one gets to the phenomenon under investigation. To achieve this desired learning in this PAR study I used, in addition to semi-structured interviews, the research technique of participant observation. Combining semi-structured interviews and participant observation generated a more thorough explanation of the coaches' and athletes' lived experiences, thus improving the probability of accurately exploring an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. These two approaches to data generation are common within PAR (Kowalski et al., 2018). Through interviews and participatory observing I immersed myself in the lives of the research participants, and this immersion is supported in the action research literature. Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003) stated, "The respect action researchers have for the complexity of local situations and for knowledge people gain in the process of everyday life makes it impossible for us to ignore what the 'people' think and want" (p. 25).

2.1.5 Data Gathering (Semi-Structured Interviews)

For the purposes of data collection, the primary research methodology embraced in this PAR study was qualitative in nature. I made a genuine attempt to understand the meaning the coaches and athletes were giving to their experiences by initially meeting with them individually and honoring the diversity of their responses (Creswell, 2014). In this PAR study, feedback from coaches and athletes regarding their experiences with an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was used to help plot action in pursuit of the goal of effectively exploring this coaching approach.

In the data gathering phase, I hoped to genuinely understand the participants' views of their own world and sought to discern meaningful patterns in the information that had been shared (Creswell, 2014). I used thematic analysis to discern these patterns. Thematic analysis is a recommended coding process for participatory research where participants collaborate in the research experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was important for me, when seeking individual perceptions of experiences, to initially ask questions that were both general and broad. Asking open-ended questions gave the respondents freedom to genuinely connect with their own life experiences, as opposed to being steered down a narrow path (Creswell, 2014). Through semi-structured interviews individual perspectives regarding coaching and being coached in an athlete-centred high performance way were analyzed for the purpose of generating relevant themes. These themes were then applied as a means of helping to address the study's research question. The same interview guide (see Appendix A) was used for the coaches and the athletes. The main intent of the interviews was to determine the coaches' and athletes' support (or lack of support) for the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, and also to determine their interpretations of the principles. There was no need to create two interview guides because the goal of the interview was the same for both groups. The single interview guide also ended up being beneficial for me as the researcher. I had no previous training in qualitative research methodology and the single interview guide provided me with the potential for a heightened level of questioning consistency. The interview questions were consistent with a constructivist paradigm, but the ultimate application of the interview data was intended to serve the transformative interests of participatory action research.

The semi-structured interviews occurred with the male head coaches of the sport academy's 16 to 18 years old male athletes in October, 2018, and with the 16 to 18 years old male athletes in November and early December, 2018. The semi-structured interviews were designed to effectively access the views of the research participants with respect to their experiences that related to the research area (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interviews were retrospective in nature as they sought to generate coach and athlete reflections regarding their sporting experiences relative to the four previously described athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

The interviews gave the coaches and athletes an opportunity to think about the concept of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach and relate it to their own experiences in sport. I introduced and explained the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles but did not initially steer the coach and athlete responses regarding how the principles related to their own sporting experiences. The interviews reflected what I knew about the topic but also opened the door for the participants to relate it to their own lives. This interview approach was consistent with the advice of Leech (2002) who stated "In an interview, what you already know is as important as what you want to know. What you want to know determines which questions you will ask. What you already know will determine how you ask them" (p. 665).

A couple of weeks prior to the interviews, I explained to the participants the study's purpose and how data would be used. As well, the consent form (see Appendix B) was reviewed, including information about confidentiality and the reason why an audio recorder would be used. At that time, participants were given the opportunity to provide written

consent, thus providing their consent to go forward with the study. In addition, prior to the start of the interviews, participants chose a pseudonym for reasons of confidentiality.

According to Kowalski et al. (2018) there is a distinct relational quality to the interview process. The research participants and I worked collectively in the interview experience. I endeavoured to ask clear questions and provide time for participant responses. If necessary, I would include prompts in an attempt to expand the dialogue between myself and the participants. Data was generated through this collective process, and I believe the participants felt they had both the time and opportunity to say all they wanted to in response to the research questions.

Prior (2017) claimed that rapport has been acknowledged for a long time as a key quality of qualitative interviewing. It is essential that the researcher attempt to develop a strong rapport with the participants in the initial stages of the interview. This means that the participants must feel comfortable around the researcher before they will consider revealing deep-seated and detailed information regarding the research topic. According to Kowalski et al. (2018) rapport represents a feeling of harmony between the researcher and research participants, and this feeling of harmony makes communication straightforward because it indicates the presence of mutual understanding.

Essentially, the participants needed to be convinced that I was genuinely interested in what they had to say. If this was not the case, even the most proficiently created interview questions would only elicit surface level responses (Leech, 2002). In the context of this study, rapport building initially involved me introducing myself and describing the nature of the

research. It then, following the asking of some demographic questions, transitioned into general questions pertaining to the participants' current sport involvement (see Appendix A).

The goal of the interviews was to facilitate the participants making connections between their sporting experiences and the four principles of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. There were eight primary open-ended question categories the participants were asked to respond to, with me probing for further related responses. The number of question categories was reasonably consistent with accepted semi-structured interview creation. A seven to ten primary question semi-structured interview is, in fact, considered common (Kowalski et al., 2018). The potential for additional probing questions is also considered an inherent part of the semi-structured interview reality (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

There was no pre-determined length of time assigned for the interviews to give coaches and athletes the freedom to elaborate as much as they desired. Following the initial demographic and rapport-building questions, the interview questions became more specific to the purpose of the current study, with emphasis being placed on the four principles of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

The interviews were transcribed through the use of DSS Player Plus Version 7 Olympus software. Once the interview information was transcribed, the coaches and athletes were given the opportunity to review it before deciding whether or not to sign a transcript release form (see Appendix C). To enhance the trustworthiness of this process I abided by Curtin and Fossey's (2007) recommendation to perform member-checking. All of the coaches and athletes had an opportunity to read and comment on their transcribed interview responses. In addition, all of the coaches and athletes were able to remove, change, or add to their personal interview

comments after the interview data had been transcribed. Most interviews were left unaltered, and any changes that did occur were minor (e.g., grammatical changes).

To further enhance the trustworthiness of this process I created the possibility for what Smith and McGannon (2017) called member reflections. Smith and McGannon (2017) claimed that member checking does not actually establish trustworthiness because neither the researcher nor participant can eliminate their subjectivity from the member checking process. Their recommendation of member reflections means the researcher and participant enhance, and perhaps expand, the data by discussing collectively the similarities and differences in their interpretations with full recognition that there is no universal right answer. The possibility for member reflections was provided for in this study by creating conditions in which both the coaches and athletes reviewed their transcribed interviews with me present. The coaches went through their transcribed interviews, with me present, in a shared office space, and the athletes went through their transcribed interviews, with me present, on the field. This gave the coaches and athletes immediate access to me if they wanted to make comments or ask questions. There ended up being very little dialogue between myself and the coaches and athletes during this time. No questions surfaced that questioned the quality or authenticity of the interview content.

The initial research plan was to incorporate a second semi-structured interview near the end of the indoor season, for the purpose of coach and athlete reflection on the research experience. However, I switched to a guided reflexivity format. This was logistically more efficient, and I sought the support of the coaches and athletes before making the switch. I shared how the guided reflexivity approach would allow for more of an open dialogue and

collective information-providing experience. Both the coaches and the athletes responded favorably to the possibility of guided reflexivity. I feel that the development of positive connections between myself and the coaches and athletes, a by-product of the emergent nature of PAR, contributed to their comfort level with switching to this form of research reflection. Guided reflexivity is a researcher-initiated technique designed to promote reflection in collections of people (Konradt, Schippers, Garbers, & Steenfatt, 2015). It provides time, space, and specific prompts to facilitate the group's reflective work (Gabelica, Van den Bossche, DeMaeyer, & Segers, 2014). A discussion of the guided reflexivity results is provided in Chapter 3.

2.1.6 Data Gathering (Participant Observation)

In this study I took a participant observer role. In other words, I not only participated in the activities of the research participants, but also took time, as a researcher, to observe those activities (Kawulich, 2005). I made my dual role of participant and observer explicit to the research participants at the outset of the study.

As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental principles of PAR is participation of the researcher in the experience of what is being researched, with PAR embracing and encouraging the exchange of ideologies, values, and insights between the researcher and the researched (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). In adhering to this PAR principle, I joined the sport academy coaching staff for the 2018/2019 indoor season to work collectively with the coaches and athletes in exploring an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

The sport academy already had in place coaches to provide physical, technical, and tactical training for the athletes. Therefore, my coaching role was to provide the athletes with

sport mental training. Sport mental training takes an educational approach to help athletes understand how their minds work in relation to their sport experience, and offers suggestions for how they can use their minds to help maximize their sport experience – it is a teaching role for which I have significant experience. Sport mental training is clearly differentiated from sport psychology, which takes a clinical approach to, among other things, understand pathologies that may be influencing athletic experience.

As a member of the coaching staff I worked with Coach Sommers (pseudonym) and Coach Thomas (pseudonym) in trying to help facilitate their implementation of athlete-centred high performance coaching principles that helped the athletes pursue the best version of themselves while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. I played a leadership role in terms of introducing and monitoring the implementation of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles but was also an active listener and very responsive to the other coaches' perspectives regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching. My introduction to the sport academy of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles was not intrusive as the sport academy declared in its mission statement that the athletes are at the centre of all the academy does.

When called upon, I provided sport mental training information to groups of sport academy athletes on topics ranging from goal-setting and self-talk to team-building and arousal control. I did not provide sport mental training sessions for individual academy athletes. Providing individual sessions could have potentially put me in a compromised position; for example, if an athlete revealed personal information that had applicability to the study's purpose, I, for reasons of confidentiality, would not have been able to make this information

public even though this information may have been important in helping inform the next actions regarding the academy's coach-athlete relationship dynamic. Therefore, my only concentrated one-on-one contact with the athletes as a researcher was when I conducted the previously described semi-structured interviews. One advantage of providing a sport mental training service for the sport academy was that it gave me a clearly defined role in the inner workings of the academy, which provided more fertile ground for the development of mutual trust and close relations between myself and the sport academy members. As Gallmeier (1988) stated, "In studying sport subcultures the investigator must be cautious in selecting a workable, situated identity within the organization" (p. 217).

The coaches preferred that I provide a short sport mental training session for the athletes near the beginning of most training sessions. Having this designated and concentrated time with the athletes as a group was, in my opinion, very helpful. It elevated my credibility in the eyes of the athletes because I was providing them sport mental training knowledge that could help them in their pursuit of their high performance sport goals. It also gave me the opportunity for frequently scheduled physical proximity with the athletes – an important variable in enhancing the connectedness of any relationship.

In addition to my participant role as a sport mental training coach, I had the opportunity to participate in biweekly meetings, both with the athletes and with the coaches. In the early stages of the academy's indoor season I made the conscious choice to prioritize the biweekly meetings as a time for data collection, data analysis, and action plan creation, and to allocate the time between biweekly meetings for me to observe the coaches' actions in the context of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Though I certainly had leadership

responsibilities in the biweekly meetings, the meetings also gave me the opportunity to interact with the athletes and coaches in a more conversational way. Consequently, the biweekly meetings were helpful not only in terms of data collection, data analysis, and action plan creation, but also in terms of potentially strengthening the connections that were developing between myself and the athletes, and between myself and the coaches.

In the context of this study, the goal of my observation efforts was to gain a more thorough understanding of the coach-athlete relational dynamic as it revealed itself in this particular sport academy's experience. This goal was consistent with the accepted academic rationale for using observation as a methodological technique. That rationale involves the researcher going into the participants' natural environment to observe, first-hand, words and actions that relate to the topic being studied (Kowalski et al., 2018).

During practices and games, I observed the coach-athlete relational dynamic in the context of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, and recorded these observations using field notes. I also made field notes about informal communication times (e.g., spontaneous post-practice discussions with the coaches) that had relevance toward a better understanding of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The trustworthiness of this process was enhanced by the fact that I was engaged in participant observation on a continuous basis and for an extended period of time (McHugh, 2008).

Essentially I became "part of the furniture" on the field. The athletes got to know me as "Mark" and would shake my hand regularly (part of the academy tradition). I would situate myself in a central location during practices, and on the bench during games. From these vantage points I would write down a running commentary of what I was observing and hearing.

The field notes I took were quite specific and detailed. For example, any time the coaches are quoted in a practice or game scenario, these were the actual words they used.

My research lasted several months, and the athletes and coaches became comfortable with my presence. They seemed to function in a free and open way around me. For example, some of the athletes started to joke around a bit with me and, at one point in a practice, an athlete just spontaneously sat down beside me to talk about his high school academic experience. I received no indication that either the athletes or coaches were on “pins and needles” around me. In fact, I became a regular member of the group and, as a result, I feel confident that what I recorded through my field notes was both authentic and clearly representative of the athletes’ and coaches’ natural experiences in this sporting environment.

My field notes described both what I observed through my senses and also made room for my interpretations, thoughts, and feelings regarding the observations (Kowalski et al., 2018). They were recorded while I was part of the natural setting of the study and, when my active participation made that impossible, they were recorded during the same day after I had left the natural setting of the study (Kowalski et al, 2018). The academy training sessions occurred early in the mornings, and after returning home from these sessions I tried to hold myself accountable to make sure, before eating breakfast, that I wrote down my thoughts regarding the sessions (in addition to the field notes I had taken at the actual sessions). I didn’t fully appreciate the benefit of this strategy until I sat down to try and capture this PAR experience in writing. The field notes I had taken were extremely valuable in helping me to recall details, feelings, and perspectives generated during the research experience. To try and effectively describe the “murkiness” of a PAR research experience is arguably difficult at the

best of times. My intentionality toward field note creation proved to be very beneficial in helping me enhance my description of the research.

I further enhanced the trustworthiness of these field notes by generating detailed descriptions of the context and circumstances pertaining to the phenomenon under study (e.g., coach and athlete experiences of coaching and being coached in an athlete-centred high performance way), so that the meaning and importance of the observed behaviours could be more fully understood (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). These detailed descriptions are provided in Chapter 3.

By use of both the semi-structured interviews, and the field notes generated through participant observation, I achieved methodological triangulation (Farmer, Robinson, Elliot, & Eyles, 2006) in the data collection and analysis phases of this PAR study. Triangulation was a way for me to cross-check my interpretations and findings using multiple methodologies (Kowalski et al, 2018) which enhanced the trustworthiness of the data collection and data analysis components of the study (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). My approach to data analysis in this PAR study will be presented next.

2.1.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis in PAR is intricately connected to the research environment. For example, as Bargal (2008) stated, “The [action research] change processes and products are evaluated while the systems are in the process of functioning in the service of their stakeholders” (p. 25). This immersive reality mandates that the data analysis thoroughly and accurately explain the research environment (Bargal, 2008). To be competent, the action researcher must know the thoughts and wishes of the research participants (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). In analogous

terms, PAR potentially contributes to the fixing of a plane while the plane is flying - this reality mandates that the proposed action recommendations be accurately discerned and carefully implemented to ensure that the plane stays in the air!

The interpretation of the data from the semi-structured interviews emanated from a thematic analytical approach. My thematic analytical approach paralleled the general direction of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analytical formula to the point of some initial theme development. I familiarized myself with the data by personally transcribing all of the interviews. The coding process I adhered to was theoretically driven and consistent with the words of Elliott (2018) who said "...coding [is] a decision-making process, where the decisions must be made in the context of a particular piece of research" (p. 2850). My research was about exploring the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, and the essence of that approach was adherence to four theoretically-driven athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Therefore, I prioritized the data that specifically addressed those principles.

I personally went through the data seeking answers to the broad question: how are the principles perceived by the coaches and the athletes? The themes I generated were in response to this question. Themes are regarded as "...general propositions that emerge from diverse and detail-rich experiences of participants and provide recurrent and unifying ideas regarding the subject of inquiry" (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007, p. 1766.). Both the coaches and the athletes viewed all four of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a positive way. A description of specific details of the coaches' perceptions of the principles is found in Section 3.1.1 (The Coaches' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance

Coaching). A description of specific details of the athletes' perceptions of the principles is found in Section 3.1.2.1 (The Athletes' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 provide a visual representation of the coach and athlete interview data analysis pathways.

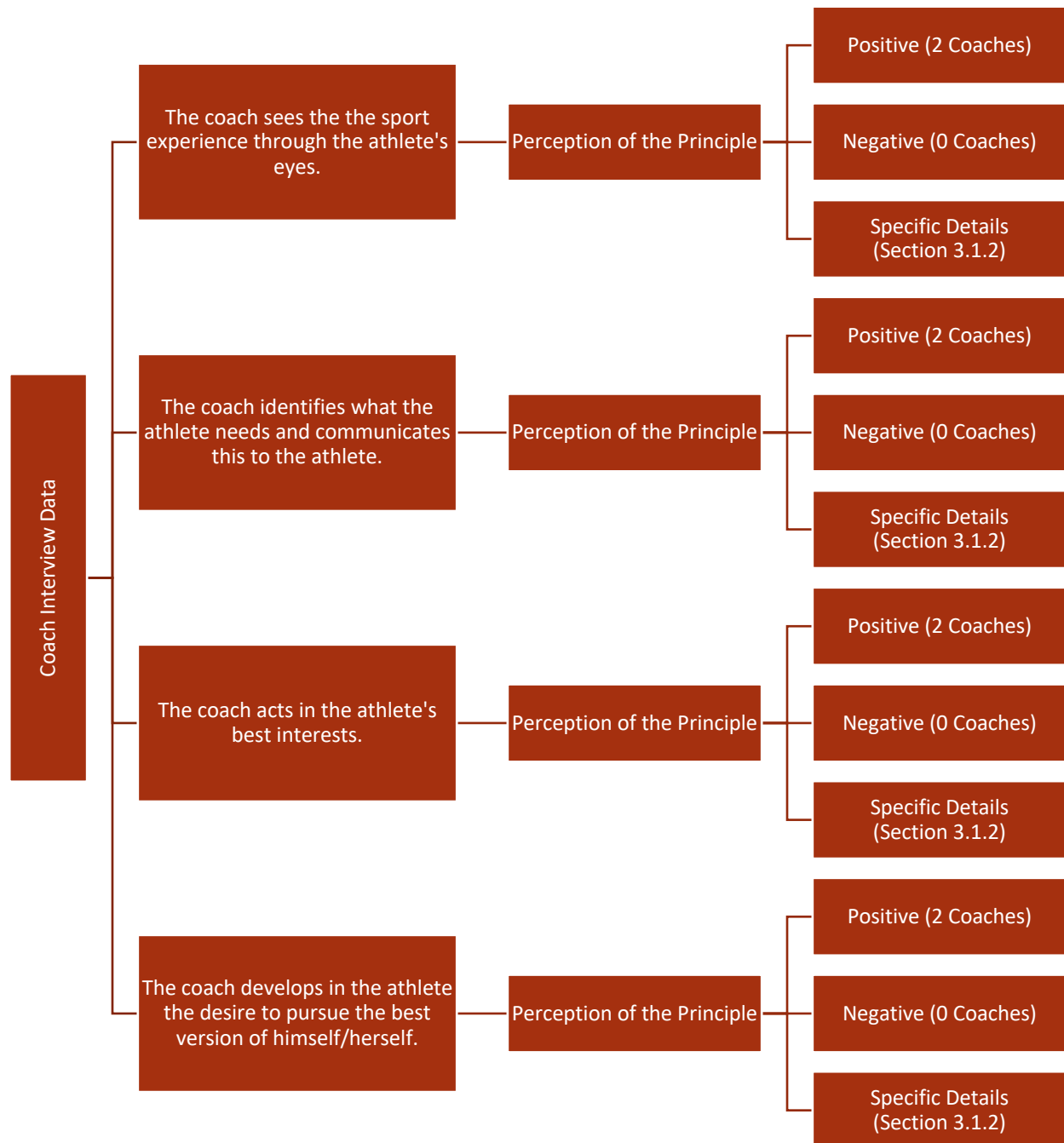


Figure 2.2 Coach Interview Data Analysis Pathway

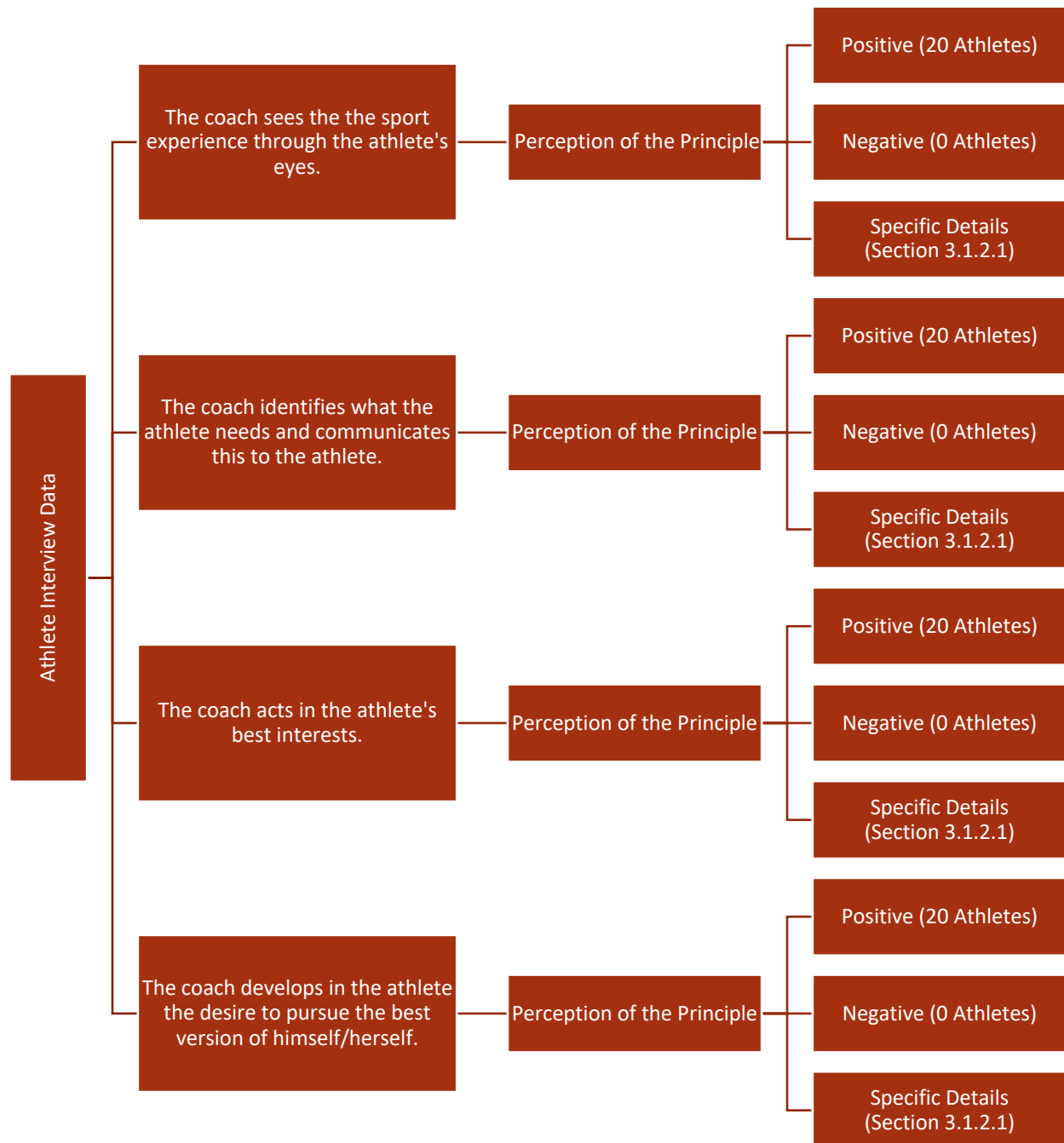


Figure 2.3 Athlete Interview Data Analysis Pathway

It is important to note that athlete-generated data (whether emanating from the athlete interviews or the biweekly meetings) was presented to the coaches before informing coaching action, and was open to verification and potential revision. For example, when I and the coaches went through athlete responses from a biweekly meeting, we discussed the athlete data that had been generated and responded to themes as they emerged in our conversation.

As mentioned earlier, my biweekly meetings with the athletes and the coaches were a focal point for data generation, data analysis, and action plan creation regarding an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The athlete data emerging from these meetings, coupled with the confirmation from the athlete interviews regarding the athletes' favorable views of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, served as the primary catalysts for action. The field notes generated through my observations of the practices and games between biweekly meetings served a monitoring role as I recorded actions of the coaches in the context of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

Data analysis was also on-going throughout the PAR study in a less formal way. The placement of myself in the middle of what was being researched created a scenario in which I needed to be mindful of how my personal experience was shaping both the interpretation and application of data. In terms of understanding participant experience this PAR study embraced qualitative methodology and, consequently, mandated my accountability in terms of how my personal realities affected both data analysis and the research experience in general. As Kowalski et al. (2018) stated, "Qualitative data analysis is inherently complex and multifaceted. As researchers experience their data, they will always be thinking and re-thinking the meaning of the findings and how new information informs their prior interpretations" (p. 156). I was

accountable for any recommendations I made linking data analysis to action. To facilitate action that was properly informed, I needed to make sure I had proficiently discerned the views of the research participants (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003), and that I had contributed to an accurate portrayal of the research environment (Bargal, 2008).

To a significant extent, I influenced and orchestrated the ordering of events in this PAR study. The genuine intent of this role was to shed light on the lived experiences of the coaches and athletes as they pondered and actualized what it meant to coach and be coached in an athlete-centred high performance way. It is important I make public that my interpretations were shaped, in part, by my own values. These value-laden interpretations were not, in fact, a weakness but simply a recognition of the reality of any human interpretive experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) went so far as to say, “All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 22). In PAR, researchers are positioned in such a way that their personal knowledge (empirical and theoretical), personal experience, and data analysis all contribute to the way in which the research questions are addressed (Kowalski et al., 2018).

Reflexivity is a research component designed to publicly acknowledge the presence of the researcher’s perspective in the research findings (Pillow, 2003). One example of reflexivity, as it related to data analysis in this study, was me recording comments on how the research experience was influencing my thoughts. This is something I would do, on occasion, in the form of personal addendums I would add to my field notes. Another example was me including my own voice in the final research document (Pillow, 2003). Both of these reflexivity strategies were connected to a coaching presentation I, with feedback from Coach Sommers and Coach

Thomas, prepared for a broader group of academy coaches. In advance of the presentation I was open in my field notes, and with the coaches, about how the research findings were influencing me, and I made my voice evident in the foundational material for the presentation (see Appendix F). These reflexivity strategies were manifestations of me being intentional about acknowledging that my personal realities may be influencing the research experience. Pillow (2003), while advocating for a more sophisticated approach to reflexivity, described the initial impact of reflexivity on the research world by stating “One of the most noticeable trends to come out of a use of reflexivity is increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process – a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel – affect data collection and analysis...” (p. 176).

It would be naïve to suggest that the presence of reflexivity miraculously elevated the data analysis to unassailable levels of reliability. In fact, Pillow (2003) argued that researchers must not let basic reflexivity function as a blanket endorsement of the quality of their work. Reflexivity does, however, represent a very practical, and academically justifiable way of enhancing the trustworthiness of the work. It must be remembered that qualitative researchers are trying to capture human experience by being right up beside it, and in the case of this PAR study, immersed in it. Such closeness made it impossible for me to be a completely neutral observer.

To justify the approach to data analysis and data application in this PAR study, I needed to consider how I, as an individual, may be influencing the examination of the data right from the point of initial research question creation to the final conclusions of the study (Kowalski et al., 2018). My awareness of my own potential influence on the findings was an essential

component of sound research methodology and an important step to take in establishing the trustworthiness of the study.

2.1.8 Communication and Action

In this study, communication coupled with action manifested itself as shared decision-making between myself and Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. Shared decision-making is an inherent component of action research (Bargal, 2008). As a participatory action researcher, I entered the research environment with hopes of generating, together with the research participants, action that would improve the quality of life of all affected by the research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

This PAR study involved me working directly with coaches and athletes to explore an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The athlete-centred high performance coaching approach explored in this study was not a recipe or a formula, but rather a set of principles that guided coach decision-making in a multitude of coach-athlete scenarios. I, on a continuous basis, kept the coaches involved and informed regarding the data being generated. This continuous co-operative connection between researcher and participants is an inherent component of action research (Bargal, 2008).

The research data helped inform the dialogue the coaches, athletes, and I engaged in, targeting the principles of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach and the way the principles were being, and could potentially be, actualized in this particular high performance setting. This dialogue was most formally experienced through the biweekly meetings involving myself and the athletes and the coaches.

The biweekly meetings with the athletes often strived for some type of take-away inventory of data, relative to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, that the coaches could reflect and potentially act upon in the next two-week period. These meetings with the athletes initially focused on specific athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, then progressed to a broader categorizing of the principles, and concluded by addressing the issue of coach emotional abuse. The biweekly meetings with the athletes are described in detail in Chapter 3.

The biweekly meetings with the coaches often strived for an intentional discussion surrounding the athlete-generated data, as well as some type of take-away action plan emanating from the discussion, whether it be external action (e.g., concrete visible action) or internal action (e.g., an altered coaching mindset). The biweekly meetings with the coaches are also described in detail in Chapter 3.

The trustworthiness of the action plans emerging from the biweekly meetings with the coaches was enhanced by the fact they were created through the collaborative efforts of myself and the coaches. A “peer debrief” safety net was also in place to, if needed, help ensure the appropriateness of any research-related action taken. My study supervisor, Kent Kowalski, was available, willing, and able to answer questions I had regarding what to do with existing research material and with research directional decisions. He was uniquely positioned to offer quality feedback because of his vast experience, not just as a scholar, but also as a coach and athlete.

It has been argued that taking an action approach to research raises the bar in terms of social research credibility (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) stated that

“Action research meets the test of action, something generally not true of other forms of social research...Action researchers worry about relevance, social change, and validity tested by the most at-risk stakeholders” (p. 25).

Though Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) talked about action research participants as “at-risk stakeholders” (p. 25), this PAR study was conducted with a clear focus on both trustworthiness and ethical appropriateness. As mentioned earlier, trustworthiness was established through transferability, thick descriptions, member checking, member reflections, lengthy observation, triangulation, reflexivity, researcher/participant collaboration, and peer debriefing. In terms of ethical appropriateness, no research participants were subjected to physical or psychological risks, and the research participants who were profiled individually used pseudonyms. The research participants had the right to refuse to answer any question. The research participants were also made aware of the fact that no penalty would be applied if they refused to answer a question or if they chose to withdraw from the study. All of the research participants who stayed with the academy throughout the indoor season, also voluntarily stayed part of the study.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 FINDINGS

The purpose of this participatory action research study was to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. Generating this understanding required the answering of the following research question: How effective is an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being? Answering such a question required the presence of coaches who knew what athlete-centred high performance coaching was, and were willing to attempt to coach in this way.

The first step of the whole research experience was an individual interview of both male head coaches of the sport academy's 16 to 18 years old male athletes for the purpose of introducing them to an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, getting feedback from them regarding how such an approach related to their lives as athletes and coaches, and determining their level of support for such an approach. This first step of the research experience, while essential for the implementation of Stringer and Genat's (2004) five-phase PAR model, actually functioned as an antecedent to the model. The research reality was that the five-phase PAR model could not be activated without the willingness of the coaches to attempt to implement an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

I was optimistic the coaches would be supportive of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, in part because the sport academy, as an organization, prided

itself on placing the needs of athletes at the centre of its decision-making. The mandate of the sport academy was to attempt to maximize the development of each individual athlete, not only to create possible post-secondary playing opportunities, but to also nurture a love for the game.

Due to the fact that the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach used in this study is rooted in theory, the thematic analysis of the coaches' interview data was theoretically-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) stated

an alternative use of thematic analysis is to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data. This might relate to a specific question or area of interest within the data... . (p. 83)

Consequently, the interview data specifically linked to the four Rogerian-inspired athlete-centred high performance coaching principles was prioritized in an effort to accurately ascertain the coaches' perceptions of these principles. The coaches' perspectives regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching will be presented first in the Findings chapter. This will be followed by a description of the first two practices. A presentation of athlete perspectives regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching makes up the bulk of the third part of the chapter, and the chapter concludes with a description of the study's actionable outcomes.

3.1.1 The Coaches' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching

Coach Sommers (pseudonym) and Coach Thomas (pseudonym) were both young coaches (under 31 years of age). Coach Thomas had been coaching for several years and Coach Sommers was relatively new to the world of coaching. Both Coach Sommers and Coach

Thomas had been high performance athletes themselves, and had played their sport at a high level. It was obvious, through their enthusiasm and energy, that Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were excited about sharing their passion for sport with the next generation of athletes. Coach Thomas had been coaching in the academy setting for several years and Coach Sommers was beginning his first full year coaching with the academy.

Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were familiar with an athlete-centred approach to coaching. Coach Sommers knew of it as a player-centred approach, and he contrasted it with the old school “my way or the highway” approach to coaching. Coach Thomas demonstrated a clear understanding of how athlete-centred coaching puts the athlete in the centre of the coaching agenda. He said “I guess my interpretation of [athlete-centred coaching] would be, obviously, everything that we do as coaches and the environment that we set up is to benefit the athlete...”.

Coach Sommers perceived the old school non-athlete-centred approach to coaching as perhaps dictatorial and based on fear, with all athletes viewed and treated in a similar fashion. He contrasted this with an athlete-centred coaching approach, which he described as emphasizing individualization. Coach Sommers said the athlete-centred approach attempted to “meet the needs of each individual to get them to their potential.”

Coach Sommers viewed all four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a positive way. However, he wondered if the principles were comprehensive enough to accommodate the necessary nurturing of competitiveness; which he felt was essential to the proper development of a high performance athlete. Coach Thomas also viewed all four of the principles in a positive way. He was able to relate to these, both through his experience as a

coach and as an athlete. What follows is a detailed look at each principle as perceived by both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

3.1.1.1 The Coach Sees the Sport Experience Through the Athlete's Eyes

Coach Sommers linked the principle of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes with the emotional quality of empathy, and valued it greatly. He said "...I think I've...tried to mold my coaching around it...". Coach Sommers valued empathy to such a heightened level of importance that he took the time to emphasize that empathy plays a key role in helping someone in any life situation – not just in sport.

Coach Thomas felt the principle of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes was very important and emphasized this importance by providing the example of the first training experience of a group of athletes. He suggested that a coach needs to be very aware of what the athletes are bringing to that first training experience. He said the athletes new to the group would be potentially feeling quite apprehensive, while the veterans would likely be considerably more comfortable. Coach Thomas felt the apprehension of the newcomers could potentially compromise their initial performance levels and that the coach should factor this in when assessing player competency.

In a manner similar to Coach Sommers, Coach Thomas broadened the other-oriented emphasis of the principle of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes to spheres beyond the realm of sport. He said, "I guess for me what comes to mind is...the first thing that I always think of is players have more going on in their lives than just the sport...". It appeared that this other-oriented emphasis was in part fueled by Coach Thomas' experiences

as an athlete, where he encountered several coaches who did not function in an other-oriented manner. Coach Thomas said

I think a lot of the coaches that I had growing up, it was very much like a, almost a fear-based style...you performed because you were afraid that if you didn't perform there would be consequences and those consequences could be you don't get to play anymore, they could just be you're singled out in front of the group.

When talking about the principle of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes, Coach Sommers also shared an example of a coach he had who was very tough on him. However, Coach Sommers wondered if perhaps this particular coach was acting this way because he believed in Coach Sommers. Coach Sommers described this as "tough love." Coach Sommers then went on to describe a former coach who did not coach a team that Coach Sommers was a part of, but provided individual instruction to Coach Sommers. This coach was actually one of Coach Sommers' best friends who, with possession of extensive coaching knowledge, was eager to help soccer players develop. Coach Sommers highlighted how this individual mentored him and helped him along in the sport of soccer.

Coach Thomas acknowledged that early in his coaching career he was much less athlete-centred. He said he taught in a more autocratic and commanding manner because that was how he had been frequently coached and thought that was the way it should be done. He said he didn't really, as a young coach, think about the impact his more autocratic and commanding style might be having on the athletes. Coach Thomas said he thought there were some benefits to the more autocratic, less amiable coaching approach, but he said he also saw a lot of athletes quit because they just weren't interested in the demands (e.g., demand for heightened commitment and involvement) being placed upon them by their coaches.

Coach Thomas felt that an important part of seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes was the possibility it created for the coach to better connect with the athlete, particularly in terms of finding out what ignited the athlete's passion for the sport. He valued

...just being able to look at it [the sport experience] through their eyes and say, like, you know what, even though soccer is very important for me and my job is to get them wherever it is that I want them to get to, they also have to want to get there as well.

Coach Thomas was in complete agreement with the notion that the more he could find out about the athletes' experiences, the better were his chances of understanding how to connect with them and get them to buy into the process of getting better as players.

3.1.1.2 The Coach Identifies What the Athlete Needs and Communicates This to the Athlete

Coach Sommers was in favor of the principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, provided the coach's communication with the athlete was done in the "right way." To explain what he meant by the "right way" Coach Sommers shared a common experience from his own time as an athlete. Coach Sommers said that in his experience growing up in soccer, when a coach identified an area of weakness, it would be shared in the following way: "[Coach Sommers], get your head out of your ass. You keep taking the touch this way...you're costing...the game goddammit."

Coach Sommers contrasted what he felt was a counter-productive coaching approach, with what he felt was a more appropriate way to be congruent with an athlete. He suggested a coach could have a conversation with the athlete, either at half-time or at the end of the game, at which time areas of improvement could be pointed out. Coach Sommers claimed that a coach being congruent with an athlete needs to come from a place of genuine care for the athlete (e.g., giving the athlete the opportunity to share what he is experiencing) and be

delivered in such a way that the athlete may become inspired or empowered by the coach's feedback. Coach Sommers suggested that if the conversation is handled appropriately, the coach and the athlete almost mutually arrive at the appropriate conclusion in terms of what the athlete needs to do to improve. Coach Sommers felt that this type of honest conversation with an athlete was possible if the coach had established a good relationship with the athlete – for example, a relationship characterized by trust.

Coach Thomas was in support of the principle of a coach identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, because he felt it was essential, for developmental purposes, that athletes know where they are at. Coach Thomas was in favor of communicating with athletes in an open and honest way, one-on-one. He said "...it's about being honest first of all and it's a lot of one-on-one conversations." The one-on-one approach to feedback was not as common in his experience as an athlete. He said that most of his coaches would address the group as a whole.

Coach Thomas provided an example of his one-on-one feedback approach, by explaining how the academy worked with a new athlete trying out for a spot. He said that after a few introductory/evaluative sessions it was very important that the coaches sit down with the athlete and provide open and honest feedback about the athlete's strengths and weaknesses, and the viability of the athlete being part of the academy. Coach Thomas said

...for those players you have to be very honest with them, and we have to sit down after those first couple of sessions...and say, okay, you know, is this the right environment for you...if it is, okay, how are we gonna get you to reach your... potential. And, if it's not the right environment for you, we've found that the feedback that we give them...is obviously very important because they're gonna go back to their club environment and they need something to work on...we can't just say, you're not good enough for here, see you later...

Coach Thomas acknowledged that these open and honest conversations with athletes can be difficult to have, but endorsed their importance. Echoing this sentiment, Coach Sommers again talked about the friend who had provided him with individualized coaching. Coach Sommers said his friend provided him with honest and sometimes tough-to-hear feedback, but Coach Sommers knew it was delivered with the intention of helping him.

Coach Thomas contrasted the open coach communication approach with his experience as an athlete. He talked about a coach he had who was very non-communicative. This reality created considerable stress for Coach Thomas, particularly when coaching actions were taken that affected him directly (e.g., a reduction in playing time), but no coach communication accompanied the actions. Coach Thomas, in describing his experience, said

...and it was not necessarily an open door policy where you could just come in and sit down and chit chat...so I felt like I had...a lot of needs that maybe weren't met in terms of, you know, if I'm not playing why aren't I playing and if I'm featuring in the lineup what can I do to continue featuring in the lineup. So, those types of conversations weren't really accessible to us at the time.

Coach Thomas did not want athletes to experience this type of uncertainty. He wanted athletes to know why things were being done. He wanted athletes to know why they weren't playing in a particular match, or what specifically they could work on.

Coach Thomas also pointed out an interesting shift he had observed in the approach of the academy athletes that relates to this open and honest approach of the coaches. He said that the trend is now that athletes want their coaches to be congruent with them, as a way of helping the athletes develop. Coach Thomas said

...a lot of the high performance players now are asking for that feedback, which is good. It's not us trying to ram it down their throats saying, "hey, you need to work on this, this, and this." They're actually coming to us now and saying, "hey, what do you think about this, or I did this, is that right, like what do, what do you think?"

Coach Thomas agreed that the athletes were not just viewing the coaches as important people in their lives, but valuable resources in their development.

3.1.1.3 The Coach Acts in the Athlete's Best Interests

Coach Sommers was in support of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests for a couple of different reasons. Initially, he discussed the importance of the athlete feeling he had his coach's unconditional support. This didn't mean a coach would blindly accept what an athlete was saying or doing, but rather, that a coach would pick appropriate times to hold the athlete accountable, instead of chastising the athlete in public. On another note, Coach Sommers suggested that acting in an athlete's best interests meant helping an athlete see where his current playing form was not going to translate to the next level. Coach Sommers used the example of ball control to make this point. He stated that an athlete may have a technical flaw, in terms of something he is doing with the ball, that he can get away with at a lower level, but he won't get away with it at a higher level. Coach Sommers was in support of the position that to generate athlete improvement you have to have those tough conversations with athletes, because even though the athletes may not be happy with what you're saying, you are actually advocating for who they are capable of becoming.

Coach Thomas was in support of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests, particularly as it related to developing not just the athlete, but the whole person. He said

...I guess for me acting in their best interests would be looking at it in terms of the holistic approach...Yes we can teach them the soccer skills but if we don't teach them to be good people or good students or place value in other parts of their lives...we're kinda doing them a disservice...

It was important to Coach Thomas to develop athlete competencies and life skills that were not just soccer-specific. Coach Sommers viewed the challenges athletes face in terms of

skill development to be an important life skill in the sense of learning how to deal with adversity. He suggested that if athletes respond to adversity in sport with negativity, they may also respond to adversity in life in a similar manner. He felt that “the number one thing soccer teaches you...for life in general [is]...overcoming obstacles.”

Coach Thomas commented on a specific high performance sport scenario where acting in an athlete’s best interests can be challenging. There are times when high performance athletes very much want to play a particular position, but are better suited, for a number of reasons (e.g., skill-set, speed, strength, etc.) to play a different position. The coach can, perhaps, see this more clearly than the athlete, but it can be challenging to move an athlete away from a position he may be passionate about playing.

If the coach is to act in the athlete’s best interests, in terms of helping the athlete reach his athletic ceiling in a particular sport, a position switch may be required, even though the athlete may not be in favor of the switch. Coach Thomas described an educational approach to this type of challenge. He said

...for us it’s that...conversation with them that, you know what, we understand that maybe you feel you’re best suited to this role; however, and I know from experience as a player, just because you’re recruited at this position doesn’t necessarily mean that that’s the position that you’re going to be played in...So I think that versatility is important as well, and that’s how we kind of explain it to the athletes...

In addition to the versatility conversation, Coach Thomas said it was important to help the athlete realize on his own how his individual qualities lend themselves better to a particular position. The goal is to not try and force the athlete into a particular position, but rather get the athlete to see the logic of him playing that position. Coach Thomas stated “...it’s getting them to realize that on their own.”

Coach Thomas did say that the reality of high performance sport mandates that if the team he is coaching is in a particular match where winning is the priority, he will play the athletes in the positions that give the team the best chance to win. He said that, even if the athlete is unhappy about the decision, “...it is what it is, and you, you’re playing in that position.” Coach Thomas felt that, in addition to advantaging the team in its pursuit of a victory, helping athletes to understand that coaches will play them where they need them is consistent with a high performance sport reality.

3.1.1.4 The Coach Develops Within the Athlete the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Himself/Herself

Coach Sommers was in support of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself in the sense that he placed a priority on athlete personal development as a human being, with sport being an excellent vehicle through which to nurture this development. He used the example of emotional regulation to make his point. Coach Sommers felt that if athletes could develop the ability to emotionally regulate on the soccer pitch, it would help them to be able to emotionally regulate in life in general.

The principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself is one that is near and dear to Coach Thomas. He said that helping and seeing the individual development of athletes is “...what really fills my fuel tank...”. He talked about how the coach needs to be patient in the developmental process, because young athletes, though maybe over-matched physically, will continue to develop technical and tactical proficiency, and when they reach 13 to 16 years of age, “...that’s when they take off and that’s when it’s like, wow!...”.

Both coaches talked about challenges they have encountered or may potentially encounter relative to the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. Coach Sommers acknowledged that he was very driven and passionate as an athlete, and commented on the challenge of dealing with athletes who did not seem to possess the same level of drive or passion for the sport. He was clear about the fact that if athletes did not have a passion for the sport, they should be doing something else. However, he also recognized that athletes display passion in different ways and that it was important for him not to use his own way of manifesting passion as the only measuring stick by which to judge the drive of his athletes.

Coach Sommers said he played with a lot of athletes who “[are] never gonna say a word, never gonna really express too much...through their body language, but they’re more driven than me...”. If his athletes appeared to not be pursuing victory with the same high degree of relentlessness he displayed as an athlete, Coach Sommers felt it was important for him to try and find out why. He suggested that one possible reason for lack of athlete passion could be the social environment of the team, in the sense that the individual athletes didn’t feel they could fully express themselves. Though Coach Sommers clearly wanted passionate and driven athletes, he displayed an athlete-centred perspective in terms of recognizing that passion and drive can be expressed in different ways, and also recognizing that in situations where athlete passion and drive is not being displayed it’s important to find out why.

Coach Thomas was candid about one of the challenges the academy faces relative to the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of

himself/herself. He said it is sometimes difficult to keep athletes passionate and inspired about becoming the best soccer players they can be. He said that when kids drop out of the academy

...we've had to look at ourselves and say are we providing an environment that is all of these things that we want it to be or are we getting too focused now on just the end result of is that player a good player or not...

Coach Thomas suggested it is a challenge to find the balance point between demanding a lot from the athletes, but also making the experience enjoyable. He said if there is no athlete enjoyment of the environment, the athletes won't stay. However, if the environment is too loose, then the athletes aren't developing and there is no reason for them to be in an academy setting. He said "...it is a fine line that we walk."

Both coaches described a personal affinity for the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. Coach Sommers enjoyed the fact that "...the best version...of you is something everyone can achieve." He said this reality allows coaches to experience a form of victory in terms of athlete development, because development can be measured relative to where an athlete was originally. The example Coach Sommers provided of this form of victory is an athlete who improves the most, but because of his lower starting level, still may not be the best player. Coach Sommers said each athlete starts at his own starting line and there is no finish line, just the pursuit of continual improvement. He contrasted this individualized coaching approach with his past sport experience where all of the athletes were viewed as being at the same starting line with the expectation that they will all get to the same finish line. Coach Sommers made the point that every athlete can pursue the best version of himself – it's not an exclusive proposition.

Coach Thomas acknowledged that as a younger coach he was maybe overly invested in technique and tactics, and didn't place the necessary emphasis on inspiring athletes to want to be all they could be. He said his perspective has changed and now "...my job, is I wanta make them fall in love with the sport and that's the only way they're gonna improve is if they actually love what they do." Coach Thomas felt that athletes with a passionate and inspired disposition toward improvement become good players even if they weren't the most technically proficient when they were younger.

Coach Thomas said that a current goal of the academy was to search for ways to ignite the passion in the athletes. He provided an example from a group of Under 9 girls that he coaches. He said these girls don't really know why they like soccer, but it's fun for them and they get to be with their friends. Coach Thomas said the academy shows these girls video footage of the Canadian Women's National Team "because a lot of them have never seen a real...soccer game on TV...". The intent of showing this video footage is to show the girls what the highest level of women's soccer looks like, and potentially, what these girls are capable of becoming. Coach Thomas said

...you show them this clip of Christine Sinclair scoring this goal from 30 yards and they go, "holy smokes, I didn't know a girl could kick a ball that hard, like, wow look at that!"...that might just be that source of ignition that they need as well...

Coach Thomas pointed out the importance of the academy finding out why athletes may be declining in their commitment level or their work rate in practice. He felt that the academy had not done a good enough job of this in the past, and he felt that this had resulted in a significant number of athletes quitting over the years. Coach Thomas believed that an athlete could be inspired by even one experience, and he pointed out an inspiring coach-led experience

from his own time as a young athlete. He described a coach who led him and his teammates through a self-reflective exercise where they drew a circle to represent their comfort zone and then discussed the importance of training outside of that circle in order to facilitate their development as players. In explaining the impact of this experience Coach Thomas said

I think I was 11 or 12, it was like earth-shattering to me. I'm like, no he's exactly right, like, I'm afraid of making mistakes, I'm doing what's easy, I need to expand myself and play outside of what's comfortable. And so, for me, that individual coach, it was just, it was something I had never heard it explained that way, I'd never thought of it, I didn't even know that that existed but it really resonated with me. I just thought...that really helped me as a player.

Though like-minded in their support of all four of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did embrace slightly different perspectives regarding the overarching utility of the principles. As mentioned earlier, though Coach Sommers supported all of the principles, he was curious regarding whether the nurturing of athlete competitiveness was accommodated within the principles. Coach Sommers felt that a high level of competitiveness was essential in a high performance athlete and summed up his feelings in the following way

...when I do a lot of thinking about this stuff what I always come back to is... development hinges on sort of the idea of competing...it's a sport. You... play against one another...and in order to develop you need to compete...above, compete better, just to simply put it, right?

Coach Sommers saw great value in all of the principles but openly wondered where the value of winning fit into their design. He said "...and if you wanta be the best you've... gotta, I mean, it's, it's hard to be the best without winning." Coach Sommers viewed a win-at-all-costs mentality as capturing the ultimate level of athlete competitiveness, and he was candid in his uncertainty regarding how to best nurture an athlete's desire to win while also emphasizing

“the process” that is so embedded in the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

Coach Sommers, while in support of the principles, didn’t want them to create coaching conditions that resulted in coaches not pushing athletes hard enough. Coach Sommers summarized his hesitance with the following statement

Well...I guess the one thing I kinda come back to is... the old, I talk, I guess, a lotta shit about the old method, you know, but that sorta historical being very sort of the coach would come in and say this is how I coach it’s my way or the highway, and, you know...I wouldn’t write, I wouldn’t write that off completely...

In contrast, Coach Thomas was clear that he felt the athlete-centred approach to coaching was going to justifiably become more and more prevalent, as it will probably prove to be the desired way to maximize athlete development. Coach Thomas felt that the authoritative, scaring athletes into performing way of coaching, may work for one or two athletes, and then may work for a relatively short period of time. However, he said

...in the long run it doesn’t work. It might work for a couple of key years, where they [the athletes] might be scared into performing and scared into training on their own and thinking...I have to do this and this and this, but at some point...that...runs out, it’s not gonna work.

Based on their comments regarding the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, I sensed that, at the outset of the study, Coach Sommers was less convinced than Coach Thomas of the overarching competitive usefulness of the principles. In saying this I am not suggesting that Coach Sommers did not value the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Rather, he questioned their effectiveness in terms of developing athlete competitiveness and a win-at-all-costs mentality. This differentiation between Coach Sommers’ and Coach Thomas’ perspectives was on display in the first two practices of the season.

The first two practices took place before the data gathering phase of the five-phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) began. I dedicated the majority of my time in the first two practices toward gaining a general feel for the coach-athlete dynamic in its initial stages of construction for this indoor season. During the first two practices Coach Thomas had the advantage of having worked with a number of the athletes in previous seasons – they understood his coaching approach and he didn’t have the challenge of needing to carefully make a first coaching impression. Coach Sommers’ reality was different. These first two practices potentially played a significant role in creating the athletes’ first impression of him as their coach. It was clear that Coach Sommers wanted the athletes to know that he had high expectations and that he was going to push and challenge them to reach those high expectations. However, it was also clear that Coach Sommers embraced the opportunity to teach these athletes and wanted to make a difference with each one of them on an individual basis.

I am providing a detailed description of the first two practices in order to paint a clear picture of the initial developmental building blocks of this particular coach-athlete dynamic. The descriptions of the first two practices are derived directly from my field notes. They are intended to provide an accurate overview of how the practices actually unfolded.

3.1.1.5 The First Practice

Though Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were considered co-coaches of this group, Coach Sommers assumed the head coaching responsibilities because Coach Thomas wanted him to, and because Coach Thomas also had multiple administrative and coaching responsibilities within the academy. My writing will reflect this coaching differentiation by

placing Coach Sommers' name first in any statements that apply to both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. In the first practice, Coach Sommers met with the athletes as a group. He told them that the first day was going to be a day where the athletes would largely play. The reason for this was that it would allow Coach Sommers the chance to see their level of play. This was the first full season that Coach Sommers would be working with this group. Coach Thomas had coached a large number of these athletes in earlier seasons.

The athletes started the practice with some speed and agility work that was led by an academy coach responsible for speed and agility training. This was a dynamic start to their practice that gave them an opportunity to get warmed up before the technical and tactical parts of training began. Following the completion of the speed and agility work, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas resumed control of the practice and split the athletes into two squads for an intra-squad scrimmage. Coach Sommers talked to the athletes about preparing for an upcoming high performance game. Coach Thomas talked to the athletes about developing a "compete" mentality.

Prior to the intra-squad scrimmage the athletes participated in a possession drill where two groups of athletes tried to keep possession of the ball while being challenged by three opponents. Initially, Coach Sommers watched the drill closely without making many comments. At one point Coach Sommers stopped the drill and tried to help the athletes understand how to effectively execute when they outnumber (9 to 3) three pressing defenders. He emphasized communication, and functioning as one unit. He started by asking them for their thoughts, and then he began teaching them. He said he didn't want them to just "run with their heads cut off,

and just work hard.” He wanted them to “work smart.” He wanted them to function “collectively.”

Coach Sommers stopped the same drill again and said to win the ball back the first principle is to have a good shape. He wanted the athletes to be “collective.” He asked them if they could “close down as a unit.” He wanted them to almost work as if they were attached by a rope. The athletes were quiet and listened attentively when Coach Sommers was talking.

Coach Sommers wanted the athletes, when in possession of the ball, to not just play the ball around the outside. To score goals he said they needed to penetrate the opponent’s lines and look for opportunities to play the ball forward. Coach Sommers addressed the team as a group before starting the scrimmage. One of the things he said was “we have to have the courage to keep the ball.” He said in possession “can we be patient.” He wanted the athletes to compete. Coach Sommers said “don’t fucking lose” as a clear indication of his desire to see their compete level.

Coach Sommers stopped the scrimmage. He said to one team that was kind of staying back, “How long are you going to let them [the other team] play in the back before we go and hunt [go and try and get the ball from the other team]?” He told them that when they press there needs to be a change in tempo.

Coach Sommers again stopped the play. He asked the athletes “what are we going to do 11 v 11 when the ball goes out of bounds in the opposition’s end?” He said they are going to attack the opposition in that type of situation and turn the ball over.

When the athletes were supposed to press and they didn’t Coach Sommers got frustrated with them. He didn’t want them to allow the other team to come out with the ball.

He wanted them to be the best team without the ball before they could be the best team with the ball. Coach Sommers demanded that they communicate and have a “press” mentality when the situation called for it.

Coach Sommers again stopped the play. He reminded the athletes about what he wanted when the ball is at the keeper. He said he wanted them to play short. Coach Sommers said they will make two, three, or four passes across the back and it will get their opponents to move up, which then gives them the chance to attack. He told the athletes to “invite teams to press us” and take advantage of that.

At one point Coach Sommers asked the athletes what the score was. They said the score was 0 – 0. Coach Sommers asked how many shots had been taken, and the consensus response was “not enough.” Again Coach Sommers stopped the scrimmage. This time he asked the question “How can we get the ball into the opponent’s end?” He said it is a problem if an offensive player is standing in the space in which he wants to receive the ball. Coach Sommers asked “can you meet the ball in the space instead of waiting in the space?” He asked “can you have the courage to play the ball in the space?” Coach Sommers wanted the athletes to, as he said, “have the fucking balls to play the ball.” He said it was fine if they made mistakes and they would not be in trouble, because when they got good at doing this “we are going to be fucking good.”

Coach Sommers had an intensity in his voice. He had high expectations and insisted on focussed effort. Coach Thomas watched the scrimmage as an observer and, in this practice, took on more of an assistant coach role. Coach Sommers stopped the scrimmage and said that realistically on a half pitch if the athletes are fit they can play “full press” for 60 minutes. Again,

Coach Sommers stopped the scrimmage. He yelled at the athletes to press up when they have the opportunity. He also wanted them to celebrate when they scored a goal.

At one point Coach Sommers said that the coaches and the athletes “don’t train to lose, they train to win.” His intensity elevated the intensity of the group. In our earlier interview, Coach Sommers had mentioned to me the challenge he sometimes faced managing his emotions as a player. As I observed the first practice, I became curious regarding how Coach Sommers would deal with the challenge of managing his emotions as a coach.

At the end of the practice Coach Sommers brought the athletes together and talked to them in a calm voice. He gave them feedback about the practice. Coach Sommers said that for the next practice he wanted to establish a standard for compete level. He said “to be the best team in the province you have to compete at the highest level.”

3.1.1.6 The Second Practice

Strength and agility work was again prioritized at the start of the second practice. Following this work the coaches coordinated full-sided game-play for the athletes. Coach Thomas played keeper for one of the teams, and he coordinated some of the action from this vantage point.

During the game-play Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas taught and provided feedback in various ways. For example, at one point Coach Sommers stopped the play and provided tactical feedback. Coach Thomas demonstrated by example (e.g., the importance of communication). Coach Sommers explained to an individual athlete, while play was going on, the importance of not killing space. Coach Thomas provided positive feedback (e.g., saying “good build-up”).

At one point Coach Sommers subbed an athlete out to teach him individually. He said to the athlete “what do you think the best 6’s in the world do?” The athlete felt that they distributed the ball. Coach Sommers told him that some of the best 6’s [e.g., a specific position in the sport] in the world play a simple game, and he wanted this athlete to start dictating the play.

Coach Sommers again took a more individualized coaching approach by asking one of the athletes on the sidelines during game-play “What is your best position? What are your best attributes?” Coach Sommers was getting to know the names of the players, and he asked one of the athletes on the sideline during game-play how he pronounced his name.

Coach Sommers returned to his message from the previous training session by energetically telling the athletes during game-play to “...get up, press, press!”. He did a fair bit of observing in the early going of the game-play, but did stop the play at one point to tell the group “we can be more successful running less.” He told the athletes “we need to be more patient with the ball, running less.” He said to them “think about making simple passes in possession.”

During the game play Coach Thomas remained on the field keeping the athletes engaged, and Coach Sommers remained on the sideline providing individual feedback. Coach Sommers’ feedback would at times be positive reinforcement. For example he told one athlete, “...that is the right idea.” At another time Coach Sommers subbed an athlete off and his first comment to him was “a lot of good work out there.” Coach Sommers then went on to provide the athlete with tactical feedback.

Coach Sommers would at times emphasize teaching points. For example, at one point he stopped the play and said “more simple passes.” He pointed out that teammates need to make themselves available to receive a pass. He told the athletes that they need to look for more “simple 10 yard passes.” He wanted them to work less and play better. He told them they were “so eager to just get the ball and go charging for the net.” He said “we are not good enough at...passing ten yards.” Coach Sommers wanted them to think about doing that type of straightforward skill correctly. Earlier in the practice, Coach Sommers provided an example of instruction after an athlete error. After an athlete committed a turnover, Coach Sommers asked the individual “What’s your 911 pass – always?” The player said “goalie.”

Coach Sommers brought the athletes in as a group after the game play and said “What do you think, what are we doing well, what do we need to work on?” He said the athletes need to be really focused on each aspect of their game play. He wanted them to be “more deliberate.” The athletes were put into a conditioning drill by Coach Sommers that was not punitive. The athletes were quiet and focused on Coach Sommers’ words.

Coach Thomas sat down beside me and I volunteered how Coach Thomas’ presence on the field as a “coach-player” was effective in raising the athletes’ level of engagement during game-play. I felt Coach Thomas might appreciate hearing my observation of the impact of that particular coaching action. Coach Thomas’ presence on the field as a “coach-player” also created a condition for Coach Sommers to provide individual coaching for athletes on the sideline. At one point an athlete asked Coach Sommers what position Coach Sommers wanted the athlete to play. Coach Sommers said, “wherever you want to play, man, wherever you feel you can most help the team.”

The team went into a full-field (width-wise), half-field (length-wise) drill to work on passing and movement. Coach Sommers emphasized that everything needed to be done in a deliberate fashion and with confidence. Coach Sommers also emphasized that every little piece of a playing experience needed to be executed with a high level of proficiency. To reinforce this point Coach Sommers told the athletes that if execution isn't with a high level of proficiency, then every lack of quality moment is "shit," leading to the next thing that is "shit," which leads to the next thing that is "shit." He emphasized a standard of high quality.

Following the second practice, Coach Sommers sent a detailed email to the athletes outlining his coaching philosophy. I have included part of his email, with his permission, as a way of providing a window into the balanced approach of Coach Sommers – a balance I describe as *a desire to impose demands on the athletes while at the same time build connections with the athletes*. Though we didn't realize it at the time, this balanced approach would become arguably the most revealing insight of this PAR study. Part of Coach Sommers' email to the athletes after the second practice read as follows

Boys,

As I have alluded to after the first few sessions, I want to be the best team. I believe we can be. It is on the pursuit of being the best that we will all become better individuals. Better individuals in the game = better individuals in life my core belief.

I'll say it again cause I like the ring to it. I WANT TO BE THE BEST TEAM. This WILL happen. The only Question is how long will this process take. This process hinges upon how hard we want to work and how much we want to get out of each training session. We get out what we put in.

The best sports people are winners. Being a winner is a mindset. I strive to have a winning mindset everyday. Doesn't mean I win every game I play, no. It means even when I lose I still win. Whether you believe you are a winner or not right now doesn't matter because my hope is you will think and act like a winner when I'm done with you. Step #1, believe that you can be better every single day in every single way. You will earn confidence this way.

Now, the attitude and work rate after the first week are very positive steps moving forward. But progress isn't easy and it's gonna take a hell of a lot more sweat and a lot more frustration but I am confident we will achieve my goal.

It's my job to recruit the best, I want the best-hard working players in our program to strengthen the training environment so WE ALL BENEFIT.

I want your guys help with that as I don't know everyone. If you have friends that you think make this training group better, please text me their name and number and I will get in contact with them...

FURTHERMORE, players please feel free to contact me as you wish. I am always open to chat about things we need to work on, maybe it's things you need to work on or maybe it's things you think I need to work on. It's a two way street with me. I want what's best for you individually because it makes my team better. That is all I care about. Making this team better. If we accomplish this, you as individuals get better. Communication is very important so don't be afraid to talk with me. I love coffee so if any of you lads wanna do a sit down and discuss things further we can meet up and do that as long as coffee is involved...

The first two practices provided me with an initial impression of the coaches in action.

Coach Sommers portrayed an intense and demanding style coupled with a genuine desire to connect in a sincere way with each athlete. Coach Thomas, though playing a secondary role in the running of the practices, showed a commitment to interact with the athletes in a positive way, but with an underlying expectation that the athletes demonstrate maximum effort and focus in their pursuit of excellence. In my opinion, both coaches were well-positioned to take on the task of attempting to implement the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. The next research step was the activation of the five-phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) as a means of exploring the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

3.1.2 Exploring the Effectiveness of an Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach

The five-phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) was activated as a means of exploring the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. This exploration lasted approximately three and a half months with the PAR phases of data gathering, data analysis, communication, and action providing the exploration's infrastructure. The data gathering, data analysis, and communication phases were consistently on display in several biweekly meetings that occurred with myself and the athletes and coaches at approximately two-week intervals throughout the exploration stage. The action phase of the five phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) was displayed during the approximately two-week intervals between the biweekly meetings.

Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were the focus of the action throughout the exploration stage of the PAR study. Their attempts to actualize the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles (based both on feedback provided by the athletes, and on conclusions generated in discussions between the coaches and myself) were the primary actionable outcomes of the PAR study.

The biweekly meetings with the athletes and the coaches were the focal point for both data generation and discussion regarding an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The data explored in, and surfacing from, the biweekly meetings became a primary catalyst for action on the part of the coaches. My field notes, generated through observations of the practices and games between biweekly meetings, took on a monitoring role, with the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles being my consistent reference point.

3.1.2.1 The Athletes' Perspectives Regarding Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching

The athletes were the primary providers of data during the data gathering phases of the exploration stage. The athletes provided their perspectives regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching through their semi-structured interview and biweekly meeting responses. The information provided by the athletes was invaluable in shaping the coaching action plans.

Though it took several weeks to complete the athlete interviews, I was undeniably influenced, right from the very first interviews, by the athletes' positive view of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. I made sure to not make use of any individual athlete interview material until athlete interviews had been completed, transcribed, and granted informed consent. However, the continually building crescendo of positive athlete views regarding the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles definitely affected my perspective in a positive and optimistic way as I planned the agendas for the biweekly meetings. This is a significant reason why I have included a summary of the athlete interview responses at this point in the Findings section. I want the reader to know what I knew about the athletes' perspectives while some of the earlier coach action plans were unfolding. My general knowledge of the athletes' favorable perspectives regarding the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles contributed to a greater confidence in me that the action plans were well-founded and worthy of pursuit.

The individual athlete interviews started during the third practice and carried on for the first five weeks of the indoor season. During the individual athlete interview phase of the research study I was, on most days, only able to be part of the beginning and ending of

practices. I spent the other portion of practice time interviewing individual athletes (who, with the coaches' permission, I removed from practice) on an adjacent field. My decreased time in practice during this time period was more than offset by the important gathering of athlete perceptions regarding the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

Similar to the coaches' interviews, due to the fact the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach used in this study is rooted in theory, the thematic analysis of the athletes' interview data was also theoretically-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Only the athlete interview data that specifically addressed the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles was analyzed, in an effort to accurately ascertain the athletes' perceptions of these principles.

The interviewed athletes were all of high school age, and were all regarded by their coaches as having at least college-level soccer potential. As had been done with the coaches, the athletes each selected a pseudonym. The pseudonyms they selected were, in alphabetical order, Barry, BigT, Bobjohn, Bruce, Carlos, Charles, Christian, David, Dawson, Eric, Fred, James, Jericho, Jim, John, Mark, Troy, Tyler, Yin, and YungT. The athletes were also given the opportunity to sign-up for an interview time and, whenever possible, the interview time was honored. The responses of twenty of the twenty-four athletes interviewed were included in this study. Four athletes discontinued with the academy before they had the opportunity to provide written informed consent for their interview content. To the best of my knowledge these athletes left the academy due to making different life choices (e.g., prioritizing academics), as opposed to leaving under negative circumstances. Written informed consent was provided by the other twenty athletes in the presence of myself as the researcher.

All of the athletes viewed all of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a positive way. However, there was some differentiation in terms of the athletes' principle interpretation. What follows is a look at how the athletes perceived each of the four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

3.1.2.1.1 The Coach Sees the Sport Experience Through the Athlete's Eyes

The coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes is essentially about a coach possessing empathy. All of the athletes viewed this principle in a positive way. Some even suggested that not only can this empathetic approach co-exist with a coach being demanding, but it actually enhances the athletes' willingness to be both receptive and responsive to their coach's demanding behaviours.

Yin suggested that this type of coach has a motivating effect on an athlete – creating within the athlete the desire to improve. Bobjohn shared the example of a former coach of his being very intentional in providing Bobjohn with specific helpful feedback. Bobjohn said he was a late arrival to high performance soccer and this coach took more time to work with him one on one, because Bobjohn was new to this heightened level of the sport. This extra investment of time on the part of the coach made Bobjohn feel very important, and Bobjohn thought it enhanced his drive to get better. In general, Bobjohn felt that a positive coach-athlete relationship enhances the probability that the athlete will work hard on his development, because he is not just working for himself but also working for the coach. Bobjohn said "...I think if they're [the coaches] actually gonna be there and, like, kinda build that relationship, like, take the first step, I think, it would make me as a player [want to]...play harder, and like, make me more driven, I think."

Tyler said if a coach has a good relationship with his athletes, the athletes are going to come to the training sessions wanting to practice. He said if a coach doesn't have this connection with his athletes "They'll be coming 50%, they'll just want to get it over with." A coach seeing the sport experience through his athlete's eyes is part of establishing this connection, and Tyler viewed this coaching principle as indicative of a coach trying to understand what an athlete is struggling with so the coach can be helpful. Tyler talked about a previous coach of his who had taken this empathetic approach, and said that this particular coach had really helped Tyler to improve. Tyler said that all aspects of him as a player improved under this coach and he kind of missed that way of being coached. He said he wished more coaches would embrace this approach. Charles shared Tyler's support for the principle of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes in the sense that he felt when a former coach connected with him as a person, and not just as a player, it was a very effective coaching practice because the coach was intentional about instructing each athlete on an individual basis.

Troy expanded this principle to encompass not just a coach seeing the sport experience through his athlete's eyes, but a coach becoming more connected with an athlete's life experience. Troy wanted coaches to be intentional and take the time to recognize what the life experience of the athlete was. He stated, "...I would like to see more coaches pretty much just, almost just have more inspiration and know what the player's going through, and know...the other side of their life...". It was important to Troy that his coach had a sense of who he is as a total person, not just as a soccer player. He also wanted his coach to understand what he was going through as a high performance athlete.

Some athletes talked about how the principle of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes could be put into practice. For example, Mark claimed that his current coaches were different than other coaches because they really cared about how he developed personally. Mark felt they connected with the athletes on a different level and took the time to show the athletes what to do, not just tell them. John made reference to a former coach who cared about what the athletes were thinking and feeling, and what the team was experiencing. He talked about his experience with this coach in a favorable way and appreciated how this coach both thought about the athletes and frequently talked to the athletes. Jericho shared a personal experience where a coach intentionally placed him in a younger age group because Jericho was quite small at the time. The coach made this move as a way of helping Jericho to gain more confidence. Jericho said that when he returned to playing with his regular age group he was a more confident player and better able to handle the demands of playing with his cohort.

Some athletes pointed out the teaching advantages of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes. For example, James felt that a coach who tried to see the sport experience through the athlete's eyes was really intentional about gaining an understanding of why the athlete was functioning in a certain way. He suggested this type of coach looks to find out what the athlete is feeling and thinking. James talked about a particular coach he had who would invest personally in the developmental progress of each of the players. He said this coach would try and understand what the players were thinking while they were playing, and then use that understanding to help explain things to the players. James

found this approach very helpful in generating, within him, a better understanding of what was happening and why he was supposed to do whatever it was he was supposed to do.

Carlos also implied teaching advantages when talking about a former coach who was intentional about trying to find out what the athletes understood and take this knowledge to create, among other things, appropriate training plans. This type of coaching action was representative of the principle of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes, and Carlos was very much in favor of this coaching principle. Jim mentioned that the principle of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes involves a coach trying to figure out how the players learn. He valued this coaching principle because he thought if a coach can learn from it, then the players can also learn from it. Barry talked about how he valued coaches embracing the principle of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes and not just screaming at athletes all the time if they made a mistake. He said these coaches focus more on helping the athletes learn from the mistake.

Fred expressed that a possible component of a coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes involves the coach maybe remembering back to his playing days. Fred thought this intentional reflection allowed the coach to relate to what the athletes were experiencing in particular situations. Christian shared an example of how the increased coach awareness brought about by this principle had benefited him personally. Christian talked about a coach of his who brought diversity and enjoyment to practices and was intentional about trying to make each individual player better – paying attention to the smaller things players could improve on. He appreciated how this coach would give the players pointers that

specifically targeted what they needed to work on, and said that his year with this coach was one of the years, in his opinion, where he improved the most.

3.1.2.1.2 The Coach Identifies What the Athlete Needs and Communicates This to the Athlete

When talking about the previous coaching principle (the coach sees the sport experience through the athlete's eyes) YungT suggested that principle mandated an individualized coaching approach. This individualized approach is also at the heart of the principle where a coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete. All of the athletes viewed this principle in a positive way.

Charles emphasized the individualized nature of the principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, by claiming it was the opposite of what he called "industrial coaching." He defined "industrial coaching" as essentially a one-size-fits-all approach to coaching where everybody is given the exact same information. Charles felt that "industrial coaching" disregarded the unique personal skills that athletes may possess. He liked it when a coach tried to build on what the individual athlete brings to the sport experience.

John highlighted the principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, as being the most important. He felt that if individual athletes and teams know where they are actually at, it will motivate them to get better. He provided a personal example where this open communication by a previous coach really helped his team. John was also clear that this level of congruence, on the part of the coach, may not always be favorably received by the athlete. In talking about coaches taking this open and honest approach, John said "...they're not going to be scared to hurt your feelings or whatever.

They're just going to tell you the facts of what you need to do [to] reach that level that you want to reach."

John's statement was, to a certain extent, in contrast to the athletes' comments regarding the previous principle which emphasized empathy on the part of their coaches. This was one of the truly fascinating revelations for me as a researcher. The athletes were seemingly equally supportive of their coach building connections with them but also imposing demands on them – even if those demands were delivered in a firm, no nonsense manner. It seemed that if the athletes felt the coaches valued them as people, and were just trying to help them get better, the demanding, sometimes negative coaching behaviours, did not compromise their psychological well-being. In fact, the athletes wanted to be pushed and challenged.

For example, Yin was supportive of coaches being authentic in identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete. He said "I think that's really good. Like, you have to have someone who has to be honest with you. Not just all the time being like 'oh no that was, that was very good.'" Yin felt that this congruence on the part of the coach prevented athletes from getting into situations where coaches left flaws in the athlete's game unattended at the lower levels, only to have those flaws cause the athlete difficulty when he advanced to higher levels of the sport. Yin referred to a personal experience involving a congruent coach, and said that this approach of the coach helped him to focus and improve.

Bruce echoed the athletes' willingness to receive this firm feedback by first saying that the principle of identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete involves a coach "...noticing things that maybe the athlete doesn't notice himself..." and making the athlete aware of these things. Bruce said he had a coach who felt Bruce needed to be more

confident on the field and needed to work on his confidence. He said this coach helped him a lot by providing ways for him to improve his confidence. Bruce said that eventually his confidence improved. When asked how he felt about the experience of this coach working with him to develop confidence, Bruce said "...it was a bit of a challenge but it paid off in the end...". He said the coach's approach wouldn't be liked by some people, but it was okay for him.

The athletes viewed this directness on the part of the coaches as a necessary element for them to improve their level of play. For example, Dawson pointed out a personal example where coaches told him a way that he could improve his game. He said the coaches identifying what he needed and communicating this to him facilitated his expansion as an athlete. David used player communication as an example of this principle. David said if a coach notices a player is quiet on the field he should "...just go up to him and tell him, just talk more, talk more, help with your teammates – they'll help a lot for you." David said his coaches in the past had communicated openly with him about the need to, before receiving the ball, check over his shoulders regarding where teammates and opponents are located. He was appreciative of this consistent reminder.

BigT was more blunt in his support of the principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete. He said "Well...if I do bad, I need the coach to tell me, you know, like I can't be...doing bad and the coach just telling that I'm doing good cause...I just don't think that's right first of all...". He talked about a former coach who was very direct with him, and who gave him specific feedback regarding what he wanted BigT to change. BigT provided a specific example of this coach helping him improve the skill of

turning properly with the ball and shooting. BigT confirmed he very much valued that this coach was clear with him and told BigT exactly what he was thinking.

Tyler shared BigT's support of a coach identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete. He said "I think it's really...important that that happens because if the athlete doesn't know what he's...not doing properly, then he'll never get good at it...". He talked about a coach he had who would insist that Tyler "wake up" in terms of doing things properly. Tyler said "you'd start actually trying to do it properly, and then eventually you'd get it and you'd start doing it properly." Barry went so far as to say that there are times when an athlete wants a coach to yell at him, provided it is yelling done with a purpose. Barry did, however, emphasize that if the yelling wasn't done with logic and purpose behind it, the athletes would not respond to it in a favorable way.

Some of the athletes commented on the importance of the coach's congruent feedback being delivered in measured tones and being framed in a way that made the athlete feel more supported than chastised. For example, Bobjohn was clearly in favor of a coach identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, but he wanted this information delivered in a way that would not dishearten the athlete in terms of the athlete's dreams. Though Bobjohn said "...I think the coach should be...pretty straight up with a player...about how they need to improve...there's no room for...softening it up," he also wanted the coaching feedback delivered in a way that the athlete did not feel the coach was dismissing or rejecting the athlete. Bobjohn felt that direct feedback would be much more favorably received by the athlete if the coach had previously established a positive relationship with the athlete. He

agreed that if a positive coach-athlete relationship precedes the coach's feedback, the feedback is easier for the athlete to receive and to work on.

Troy described how the context in which direct feedback is given helps to moderate the potential harshness of the message. He viewed congruence on the part of the coach as a sign of the coach's respect for the athlete. He said that identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete is a sign that "...they [the coaches] understand the athlete in the sort of way that they know the athlete can be better or train harder...". Troy pointed out the positive impact of one coach having this type of open and honest communication with him. Troy said "...it just opened, opened up what my potential is like and it just, I guess just makes me want to push myself each and every day."

Jim spoke about the importance of a coach providing balanced open and honest feedback. He did feel it was important for a coach to be open and honest with his athlete regarding what the athlete needs to work on, but this constructive feedback should be balanced with information regarding what the athlete is currently doing well. Jim made reference to coaches from his past who would take a direct approach with him in pointing out areas he needed to address to further his development as a player. Jim also, however, said his coaches would tell him what he was doing right.

James talked about the principle of a coach identifying what an athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, as an extension of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes. In providing an example of this principle on display in his own athletic career, he made reference to the same coach who had demonstrated empathy by investing personally in the developmental progress of each of the players. James said this

coach had a notebook that contained notes about every player, the areas they needed to work on, and the things they were supposed to do. James said that, with this approach, the coach evaluated everyone and it was very helpful. He confirmed that the coach identified both his strengths and the areas where he could improve. Christian also described the other-oriented potential of this principle by saying that when a coach identifies what an athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete it could involve the coach being available to provide support for a player “if something else is happening outside of soccer...”. In addition, Christian mentioned that congruence could involve a coach being firm about lifestyle related matters that impacted sport experience. He pointed out the importance of a coach emphasizing athlete rest and nutrition. Christian talked about one of his coaches who was very strict about proper nutrition. Christian believed that when the athletes followed their coach’s nutritional instructions, they played at their best.

3.1.2.1.3 The Coach Acts in the Athlete’s Best Interests

All of the athletes viewed the principle of the coach acting in the athlete’s best interests, in a positive way. Some athletes viewed this principle as representative of the coach determining what he thought was best for the athlete, and acting in accordance with this determination. Some athletes viewed the principle as both coach and athlete-directed, while other athletes viewed the principle as more athlete-directed, with the coach essentially acquiescing to the wishes of the athlete.

Eric took the coach-directed perspective and said he found it motivating to have a coach acting in his best interests by providing individual feedback, because this let him know the coach was thinking about how Eric was playing. He felt this individual feedback gave him

concrete material to work on outside of the regular group training experiences. Eric provided the example of perhaps a technical problem with his first touch on the soccer ball. Once his coach had explained this technical flaw to him, and instructed Eric on how he could train to be better, Eric felt he was then able to take this knowledge and apply it to training he did, for example, at home. Bruce also supported the coach-directed perspective of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests, and referenced the example where his coach had helped Bruce raise his confidence level. He felt his coach had Bruce's best interests in mind in wanting to help Bruce raise his confidence level. Bruce believed that his coach felt Bruce improving his confidence was a key piece of him improving as a player.

Some of the athletes demonstrated support for a coach-directed view of the principle of a coach acting in the athlete's best interests by speaking out strongly against the athlete-directed view. Jericho felt that the coach may very well know what is best for the athlete and that the athlete should be prepared to defer to the coach's perspective regarding what is in the athlete's best interests. He referenced a personal experience from provincial team play where he wanted to play striker, but his coach insisted that he was better suited to playing on the wing. The coach played Jericho on the wing, and this decision turned out to serve him well in his soccer career. Tyler also didn't want the athlete to control the agenda. Speaking as an athlete, Tyler said "...I think it shouldn't be towards our best interests, it should be the way he likes to coach." Tyler felt that if the athletes adhered to the coach's plan it would probably make them better. Dawson's view of this principle was also coach-directed but somewhat unique. He said that in his experience his coaches tended to interact with him in a negative way. What he chose to do was to take this negativity and use it to inspire him to play better at

that time. He said he reached the point where he got used to the negativity and actually liked it – he would reframe it in a way that was useful for him. By embracing this reframing approach it appeared that Dawson was viewing negative coach interaction as acting in his best interests.

Some athletes viewed the principle of a coach acting in the athlete's best interests as both coach-directed and athlete-directed. Charles said a coach acting in the athlete's best interests meant the coach worked on things that the athlete wanted to work on, and worked on things that both the athlete and the coach wanted to work on. When discussing the principle of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests, BigT referred to coaches who would let him figure things out on his own, but be there to provide help if he needed some. BigT agreed that this type of coaching approach saw the coaches providing guidance and direction, but the athlete was the one providing the energy and the force. Mark viewed coaches acting in the athlete's best interests as coaches acting in a manner consistent with an athlete's personal goals. This implied some diversity in the coach's approach. For example, Mark suggested that coaches would be intentional about pushing an athlete harder and being more encouraging if they knew the athlete wanted to be part of the experience. However, coaches may not push as hard if they knew the athlete was not motivated to be at the top of his game. For YungT, a coach acting in the best interests of the athlete meant a coaching approach that sought to maximize the probability the athletes will buy into the tactics and goals the coach has for them. YungT said "...if you have a group of players that don't wanna do what you are coaching them to do then...they're not going to perform at the highest level...".

Some athletes viewed the principle of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests as primarily athlete-directed. For example, Christian saw this coaching principle as being

representative of a coach's willingness to allow an athlete to experiment and show what he can do with positional preferences or situational preferences (e.g., set plays). Though Christian had this perspective, he did point out that all of his coaches had as their first priority the team's best interests, as opposed to the best interests of individual athletes. David also thought that most of his coaches had a team-first, individual-second kind of mindset, and he was okay with that. In contrast, Jim saw the principle of a coach acting in the athlete's best interests as indicative of coaches being intentional to factor into their practice plans things the individual athletes want to work on. Jim said "...I really like when coaches coach to...what the kids like doing...it just gets me more motivated to...try and...give it more, all my effort and, and improve overall...". Carlos rated the principle of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests higher than the other principles, and described it as "...[coaches] not necessarily...just looking out for themselves, and maybe trying to just climb up the ladder...they want the athletes to develop and be the best that they can be and have success all around them." He felt that coaches who adhered to this principle were not "...constantly bringing [athletes] down."

A number of athletes referenced the proper handling of athlete injuries as indication of a coach acting in the athlete's best interests. John appreciated coaches respecting the need for athletes to recover from their injuries, rather than overplaying the athletes in an effort to get a result. John felt that almost all of the coaches he has had have taken this positive approach to athlete injury recovery. Yin said coaches have acted in his best interest when he has been injured in terms of giving him instruction intended to help him recover. An example of this would be a coach making sure he did not rush back too quickly from injury.

Being sensitive to the injury reality of athletes was also mentioned by Bobjohn when he commented on the principle of a coach acting in the athlete's best interests. Bobjohn shared the personal example of two previous coaches not allowing him to return to active play too early following a concussion. The coaches were acting in Bobjohn's best interests because he wanted to return earlier than he should. James said that a coach, when acting in the athlete's best interests, won't make the athlete train with everyone else when he is injured, but will rather provide a separate training alternative.

Barry also referenced the proper handling of athlete injuries in the context of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests. In addition, he mentioned the darker side of injury management, when coaches don't focus on the athlete's best interests. Barry provided a couple of examples of coaches from his past who respected an athlete's need to recover from an injury. However, Barry also pointed out that as he moved to a higher level of soccer, and the coaches became more focussed on winning, he experienced coaching where the coaches were more concerned with "...getting their name on a trophy than they worry about actually preserving the player and getting him to the future." He said he really didn't want to play for those types of coaches.

3.1.2.1.4 The Coach Develops Within the Athlete the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Himself/Herself

All of the athletes viewed the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself, in a positive way. For Dawson the merit of this principle was embodied in the fact that this type of coaching approach prevented an athlete from plateauing. Dawson said it prevents athletes from being "...that one player who's

not learning...". Fred blended together the principles of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests, and the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. He said that acting in the athlete's best interests meant the coaches are "...trying to help the athlete realize their full potential...". When discussing the coach developing desire within the athlete to be all he can be, Fred commented that this principle is effective for motivating athletes. He made specific reference to a coach who helped him continue with soccer, even though there was a point in time when Fred was not a very good player.

Fred's support for the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself was echoed by basically all of the athletes. For example, Yin commented on the competitive benefit of having a coach who was helping athletes pursue the best version of themselves. He said this principle had the power to motivate athletes and help them to not play afraid. He supported the position that this approach by a coach had the power to inspire him as an athlete. Troy was also supportive of the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. He recalled a coach who motivated him to be better and inspired him to train harder and reach for his full potential. YungT stated, when describing a coach he had who tried to develop within him the desire to become the best he could be, "[it's]...very uplifting...[it's] almost like the coach cares about you...as a person, not some player, you're not just a piece of meat running around to get them results...".

Carlos combined the principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete, with the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. Carlos described this part of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach as “...seeing things that the athlete needs to improve on and then helping them with it, and helping them develop to be the best player they can be.” He talked about an experience he had with a former coach, where the coach was intentional about giving Carlos strategies he could follow to regain some lost confidence. Carlos said the strategies were very helpful and confirmed that the coach had a favorable impact on him. Carlos also discussed the importance of a coach creating an environment that enhanced an athlete’s desire to train and work hard. He shared an example of a former coach who was tough but also intentional about creating a positive environment that the athletes found enjoyable.

Several athletes shared strategies that coaches could employ to help develop within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. For example, Jim said that one way of coaches developing motivation within him was to share examples of athletes who were similar to Jim and went on to develop to a high level. Jim said, “...[a coach will] give you examples, like, this person I remember at your age...was that good, same level as you and now he’s up there, so you could do that too or something...”. YungT also liked the idea of a coach providing for an athlete the perspective of what level the athlete can reach. YungT thought that if a coach could get an athlete to see what he was capable of becoming it would be important for his development. In addition, Eric mentioned the approach of coaches bringing up the examples of other players that have had success in the sport. Eric said this information

provided him with some motivation “...to be the best that I could be...” because it may lead to playing at these higher levels. Eric acknowledged that establishing a connection with these players, who have already gone down the path he is travelling, created the potential for him to experience the same type of excitement that comes through attaining a place in higher and higher levels of the sport.

Barry talked about short-term ways coaches could provide inspiration (e.g., a locker room speech). He said “...some days you just aren’t as intense as other days and then you need someone to [say]...’bring it up’...”. Barry felt the inspiration had a longer term effect if the short-term experiences were repeated. BigT highlighted the force of example. He talked about one of his current coaches who played at a high level of the sport, still plays at a high level, and who has a significant knowledge of the game. He said this coach inspires him to reach the levels his coach reached.

There was no indication given by the athletes that the coach should adhere to the principle of developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself in a gentle manner. Tyler said that if a coach is developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself, it means the athlete is being pushed to get to his best and this increases the probability that the athlete will improve. Tyler wanted high performance coaches to be demanding, even harsh, “...so you [the athlete] know you’re getting better every day and the coaches know that you’re getting better.” Tyler talked about a coach he had who was very demanding. He said he wanted to listen to this coach because if he didn’t he was afraid of making a mistake. He said this type of coaching made him expect more out of himself. Jericho used a provincial team experience to illustrate the importance of the principle

of a coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. He said that he and a lot of his provincial teammates were quite skilled technically but they “...didn’t have the...heart or passion to play.” He said his provincial team coach was intentional about insisting that the team play with more heart and passion, and he viewed these efforts by the coach in a positive way. Bruce emphasized that he preferred to be coached in a demanding way. He agreed that his number one priority was to be pushed by his coach and be challenged by his coach to become all he could be. Bruce said “...I think challenge is...one of the best ways to improve.”

Though not emphasizing a demanding nature, two other athletes talked about the principle of a coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself, in the context of the coach pushing them to a higher level or igniting within them a passion for the sport. James felt that it was necessary for an athlete to break through an internal barrier in order to pursue his athletic ceiling, and that the coach could help the athlete break through this barrier. He supported the notion that breaking through this barrier is like having an inspirational fire lit within the athlete, and once the fire is lit it fuels itself. James identified three coaches who had provided this type of push for him. He appreciated their efforts. He said, “I like it,...they want me to push forward, they...want me to...be the best I can be.” Christian echoed James’ passionate emphasis by speaking favorably about a past coach who had sort of developed, within him, a passion for soccer. Christian said that coaches who are adhering to the principle of developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself, are “motivating the players to succeed in the practices, games, and

tournaments, and [making]...sure they're continuing on the same passion toward soccer, and if not, making the passion sparked up once again..."

Two of the athletes presented somewhat unique perspectives regarding the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. John felt that coaches applied this principle to different athletes in different ways. He said "...it's kind of a coach that knows how to get...the best out of someone and, ...like, like doesn't matter what it is they'll kind of, they'll kind of try and evoke something that, that maybe they [the athletes] didn't have before." John agreed that the coach's approach could change depending on the athlete, but didn't have personal experience with this type of individualized coaching. He said the coaches he has had tended to focus on team improvement more than the improvement of the individual player.

Bobjohn made the point that when coaches help athletes pursue the best version of themselves they are going beyond the realm of sport, and providing life lessons. He emphasized athlete character development as a key part of this coaching principle and provided some examples of athlete character developmental areas – being on time, functioning with manners, and standing up for yourself. Bobjohn saw significant relevance in this character emphasis because athletes aren't going to play forever, and they need to carry the lessons they've learned through sport into "real life."

It is important to note that, at the end of the study, athletes continued to view the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a positive way. In their anonymous guided reflexivity responses at the end of the study the athletes voiced considerable approval for coaching behaviours they experienced throughout the study that were consistent with an

athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. This approval applied whether the coaching behaviours were more demanding in nature or more connection-building

There was almost no negative athlete feedback regarding the demands placed on the athletes by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, and the coaches' demands were considerable. One athlete said "Our coaches demand 100% quality with everything – positioning, touch, etc. They also challenge us to give our best effort and to never give up." Another athlete said "They [the coaches] always demanded intensity to the entire group as a whole and pushed us to use maximum effort in every situation."

The athletes also voiced broad recognition of the efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to build connections with them. They identified specific behaviours as connection-building. One athlete said "We shake hands before and after practice, building a stronger relationship and bond, and they [Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas] ask about how we are feeling." Another athlete said "They [Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas] have taken into consideration our personal strengths and weaknesses and have gotten to know where we want to go in the future, not where they want us."

Some athletes also resonated with the efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to balance the imposing of demands with the building of connections. For example, one athlete wanted Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to continue "Being supportive [but also] being hard on every single player to push them technically and mentally." Another athlete said "They [Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas] talk to us about things outside of soccer, they give us constructive criticism, tell us things we're doing well."

A handful of athlete comments about coach favoritism were the only prominent point of criticism voiced by the athletes when assessing the coaching efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. I personally did not see blatant coaching favoritism on display, but I did discuss the topic with Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were actually quite okay with this athlete feedback. They said that they had been intentional about singling out particular athletes as being positive exemplars of the values (e.g., commitment, extra effort, etc.) they wanted the academy to stand for. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas thought that this singling out process was inciting jealousy on the part of some of the athletes who had not been identified as positive exemplars of these values. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas felt that if an athlete was upset because he hadn't been recognized for espousing these values, it was just an indication that the athlete needed to do more to reach the level they expected of him.

Even if coach favoritism existed, the positive feedback the athletes directed toward the athlete-centred high performance coaching behaviours of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas significantly outweighed any negative commentary. The fact that the athletes viewed the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in such a favorable way was confirmation that the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles are worthy of further investigation as potentially very important factors in the creation of both positive and successful high performance sport experiences. The actual athlete-centred high performance coaching efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas make up the concluding portion of the Findings section. They are presented in the order in which they were prioritized, and they are this PAR study's primary actionable outcomes.

3.1.3.1 Actionable Outcome #1 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Seeing the Sport Experience Through the Athletes’ Eyes

The first biweekly meetings with the athletes and the coaches took place on November 9, 2018. At this point in the PAR study I was part way through the athlete interviews. All of the athlete interviews, completed to this point in time, had revealed consistent support for the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. I met with the athletes in the last part of the November 9, 2018 practice, and then met with the coaches after the practice. I told the athletes that we would be meeting near the end of practice every second Friday, and that the purpose of our meetings was to discuss their sport experience in the context of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

I explained to the athletes that the first athlete-centred high performance coaching principle mentioned in the information I had provided them was “the coach tries to see the sport experience through the athlete’s eyes.” I emphasized that this principle could be followed most closely by the coach if the athletes were open about what their experience is like.

The goal of the November 9, 2018 biweekly meeting with the athletes was to give the athletes an opportunity to provide information to Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas regarding what their sport experiences had been like up to this point in time in the indoor season. Each athlete was given an index card and a pen. They were asked to not sign their name so as to give them the comfort of anonymity. They were asked to write down, on the index card, an answer for each of the following questions: (a) What has your academy experience been like over the past two weeks? How would you describe it? (b) What things are being done by your coaches that are helping your development? (c) What things are being done by your coaches that are

either not helping or are hurting your development?, (d) Are there things not being done by your coaches that you feel should be done, and, if so, what are they?, and (e) What approach to coaching works best for you to help you grow and develop?

The athletes wrote their responses on the index cards and then handed the index cards to me before leaving the meeting. The athlete responses to these questions were an example of the data generation phase that is so critical to the five phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004). The athlete responses were reviewed and discussed by myself, Coach Sommers, and Coach Thomas in our meeting following the practice. This intentional review and discussion addressed the data analysis phase of the five phase PAR model, as well as the communication phase (Stringer & Genat, 2004). The data analysis and communication spawned an action plan (the final phase of Stringer and Genat's [2004] five phase PAR model) that would serve as an area of focus for Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas in the two-week time period prior to the next biweekly meetings. This approach to the five phase PAR model was the foundational pattern for the exploration stage of the study.

Frisby, Reid, Millar, and Hoeber (2005) stated "Participatory research is fundamentally about the right to speak, and it is the researchers' role to facilitate the breaking of silence" (p. 382). This PAR principle underlies my commitment to make sure the voices of the athletes and the coaches were heard in this dissertation. Though I have been intentional about summarizing athlete and coach information, I have also been intentional about including actual words of the athletes and coaches to accurately capture the important perspectives they brought to the PAR experience. Including words of the coaches and athletes was essential because this PAR study was a collective endeavor involving myself, the coaches, and the

athletes. Though I acknowledge that I personally decided what athlete and coach comments to include, using importance, meaningfulness, and relevance as inclusion criteria, I would have been acting in an unjust manner if I had only included my interpretation of their written and spoken contributions.

The actual athlete responses to the first biweekly questions were as follows:

1. What has your academy experience been like over the past two weeks? How would you describe it?
 - *"It has been very nice and I hope [Coach Sommers] has a lot of new things for me to learn"*
 - *"Great, fun"*
 - *"My experience has been good the intensity could be better from the players but everything else is good"*
 - *"It's going pretty well for me"*
 - *"Getting back fitness"*
 - *"The experience has been good"*
 - *"Different, fun, good training"*
 - *"Learning, playing with good players, growing, personal development"*
 - *"Very enjoyable because I've felt like there is a very open relationship with coaches. I can be honest with the coaches"*
 - *"It's been fun. Learning a lot and hopefully improving"*
 - *"Good"*
 - *"It has been good, very tactical and challenging"*
 - *"Recovering session"*
 - *"It's been positive mostly. There's been lots to learn"*
 - *"Good, challenging, intense, I'm learning how to improve"*
 - *"It's been early mornings but I wish we had more training"*
 - *"It was pretty good. But can't perform my best because of injury"*
2. What things are being done by your coaches that are helping your development?
 - *"They [the] coaches are describing and going into detail with every little thing we work on"*
 - *"Pushing me harder, fixing mistakes"*
 - *"The personal talks that [Coach Sommers] gives"*
 - *"Helping us stay intense and focused"*
 - *"Positional advice"*
 - *"Our coach is coaching us one on one positively"*
 - *"Helping me getting confident on the ball, helping me to take a better touch"*

- *"Learning from mistakes, teaching high standards, Individual instruction"*
- *"Not emphasizing on mistakes but on the good things"*
- *"Giving me advice about my position. Motivating me"*
- *"Giving tips and helping me fix my mistakes. Keeping a high standard"*
- *"Stopping the play and telling individuals what they should be doing in that situation"*
- *"I'm listening to their advice"*
- *"They constantly reinforce that the #1 trait is hard work"*
- *"Stopping play to explain how to do the sequence properly. Relating drills to games"*
- *"Telling me I can do better, explaining another option I can do. We train on the more advanced stuff"*

3. What things are being done by your coaches that are either not helping or are hurting your development?

- *"There are none. I know I can get better here"*
- *"Nothing"*
- *"Morning practices"*
- *"No, I don't think there's nothing that's hurting me as a player"*
- *"NO"*
- *"Nothing"*
- *"Not knowing everyone yet"*
- *"Some players"*
- *"Can't think of anything"*
- *"Everything is fine. I am just being hard on myself about improving. I always see mistakes I do and not the success"*
- *"No"*
- *"No"*
- *"None"*
- *"No"*
- *"Not helping with individuals"*
- *"For me I'm not getting my individual growth but strengthen me as a player"*
- *"Being pressured a lot when on the ball. Not from the coach but players"*

4. Are there things not being done by your coaches that you feel should be done and, if so, what are they?

- *"There is nothing. The pace we are going at right now is good"*
- *"Shooting drills"*
- *"Tactical classroom sessions 'what ball is the right ball to play'"*
- *"I have no idea, I think everything is going right"*
- *"11 v 11 game/scrimmage"*
- *"Putting players together for chemistry"*
- *"Work on my touch more"*

- *"More shooting practice/instruction"*
- *"Individual meetings with coaches"*
- *"One small thing is proper stretching time because a lot of people are sore"*
- *"More SAQ [Speed, Agility, Quickness Training]"*
- *"Rondo at the beginning more often"*
- *"Working on wing play"*
- *"No"*
- *"I need more drills that help benefit me"*
- *"Need players to stop bitching, moaning, and hating when other players lose the ball"*
-

5. What approach to coaching works best for you to help you grow and develop?

- *"The strong/demanding coach"*
- *"Open, honest, strong"*
- *"Strong approach and communication with players 1 on 1"*
- *"Coach that inspires or motivates the team"*
- *"1 on 1, telling me what to do then critiquing"*
- *"When the coach tells me ideas and I decide how to use them"*
- *"Positive, be honest and tells me what I'm doing wrong"*
- *"Coaches ask questions"*
- *"Not getting mad at mistakes and helping me get better"*
- *"I like a direct approach which the coach understands the athlete"*
- *"Strong approach"*
- *"Questioning coach, so he'll ask questions and you decide what the answer is"*
- *"Strong approach (tell what you want me to do)"*
- *"An athlete-centered approach"*
- *"Hands-on, involved"*
- *"Like a strong approach where the coach explains what we're doing than teaches us what was wrong"*
- *"Nah, everything is good"*

Coach Sommers, Coach Thomas, and I met after the athlete meeting, and I shared the athlete responses with both coaches. We discussed a coaching action plan for the next two weeks, based upon the athlete responses. The biggest takeaways from the athletes' responses were that they valued the coaching they were receiving, they were okay with the coaching being strong and demanding (in fact, a number of the athletes mentioned they valued strong coaching), and they felt their coaches could genuinely help them. There was also some hope

expressed for more individual coaching. In addition to this feedback, it was apparent that a positive relationship was being developed between the athletes and the coaches. One athlete actually used the phrase “athlete-centered” coach in describing the way in which he preferred to be coached.

The coaches took this information and committed to maintaining a clear and demanding coaching approach, but intentionally supporting this approach by valuing the importance of establishing good relationships with the athletes and being willing to work with each individual athlete, regardless of his skill level. My job was to observe the coaches’ coaching actions over the next two-week period, with the agreed upon coaching action plan being an important point of reference.

During the time period between the first and second biweekly meeting (November 23, 2018) I observed three games involving team members, as well as parts of three practices. Games bring with them an increased focus on results, and it was interesting to observe how Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas managed this reality in the context of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach they were attempting to implement. Prior to the first game, Coach Thomas offered inspirational words and Coach Sommers offered tactical advice. When the game began, Coach Thomas took a secondary role while Coach Sommers actively coached from the sideline. Coach Sommers’ mirrored the energy he had displayed in practices and also the tactical emphasis on pressing the opposition. He was passionate about encouraging the athletes to celebrate good plays. He emphasized optimism and resilience, telling the athletes they would get another opportunity (after missed scoring attempts) and

wanting the athletes to deal with their situations on the pitch while encouraging them to make plays.

Coach Sommers' coaching actions in the first game seemed to be consistent with the initial coaching action plan of being clear and demanding, but also valuing the importance of a good relationship with the athletes. It also appeared that this first game experience caused Coach Sommers to reflect on the balance between pursuing athlete development and pursuing the win. After the next practice (November 15, 2018), I was visiting with Coach Sommers and he expressed a challenge he was experiencing in terms of how to emphasize the development of individual athletes but also pursue wins in competition (which would mean athletes wouldn't receive an equal amount of playing time, or necessarily play in the positions they preferred). Coach Sommers was essentially asking me for some advice, and, based on over three decades of coaching experience, I responded in the following way. I told him that a coach has two responsibilities: helping each individual athlete become the best he can be, but also helping the team become the best it can be. I told him the second responsibility meant that as a coach he would have to make some tough decisions regarding, for example, playing time. However, I also said that the athletes have to understand that in high performance sport they must think "team first and player second." Coach Sommers really appreciated this feedback and planned to incorporate it in his discussion with the athletes regarding his approach to competition.

After this practice, Coach Sommers sent an email to an individual athlete (a younger athlete training with the older group) complimenting the athlete's coachability and his ability, and encouraging him to return to train with the older athletes. This email demonstrated an attempt by Coach Sommers to prioritize establishing positive relationships with individual

athletes – part of the coaching action plan emanating from the November 9, 2018 biweekly meeting. I am including the bulk of this email as an indication of Coach Sommers' intentionality in trying to build connections with his athletes:

[Athlete's Name],

Wanted to say, you've been stand out for the 15s and continuing that with the 17s we are very happy with today's performance. You are very coachable and it shows, you are applying the information you are getting from either [Coach Thomas] or I and making rapid improvements. This is a joy to see, keep it up. If you can get a good night's sleep so you are rested and not too tired come out and train tomorrow...

If not I'll see you Saturday. Good stuff

[Coach Sommers]

In the next practice (November 17, 2018), both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas demonstrated the balance of placing demands on the athletes, while at the same time building connections with the athletes. For example, Coach Sommers raised his voice to encourage the athletes to get pressure on the ball and had real emotion in his voice in trying to inspire the athletes to be more assertive in pressing. Coach Sommers also took the time to joke around with an athlete on the sideline. Coach Thomas provided instruction to individual athletes from the sideline while watching a game-play drill. He also checked on an athlete who was injured in the drill and, in a caring gesture, put his arm around the athlete's shoulders. At the end of the practice, both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas talked to the athletes about the importance of being really focused so they could maximize the training time they have together.

What started to become apparent to me following this practice and the next one (November 19, 2018) was that some athletes were okay with being coached "hard," provided a

good relationship had been established between the coach and the athlete. It seemed that Coach Sommers' and Coach Thomas' action plan of coupling demanding behaviours with building connections was an approach to coaching that high performance athletes valued. This potential reality was revealed in a stark way prior to the team's game on November 22, 2018. The team was up against strong opposition and Coach Sommers addressed the athletes in the locker room prior to the game. Coach Sommers was very clear and direct with his comments. He said he had lots of players and that he was going to play the guys that have the fight to win. He said "Boys you have to have the fucking fight to win. I can play the worst 11 players; and if they have the fight, they have a better chance to win."

Coach Sommers also asked me if I wanted to address the group in my role as a sport mental training coach. I asked the athletes to consider how hard they would play if they knew they would each be receiving \$50,000 for a win. I then asked them how hard they were thinking about playing in the current situation. I suggested that there should not be a gap in their effort level between the two scenarios, and I implied that they needed to push themselves to an effort level approximating what it would be should there be such a personal financial gain for a victory. At this point, Coach Sommers, who was sitting down and looking at his clipboard, said "and if you don't do that you can fuck off."

Needless to say Coach Sommers' statement caught me by surprise, and I scrambled for a follow-up statement. What I came up with was "Well, that's another way of saying it." What I was really interested in was how the athletes were going to respond to Coach Sommers' direct and potentially biting statement. When I looked around the locker room, the only emotional response I saw was some grinning faces. It appeared the athletes were not affected in a

negative way by Coach Sommers' statement. If anything, they gravitated toward his intensity and resonated with the passion he had for the competition. *It struck me that his intentional investment in them as people was providing a relational foundation upon which he could make further demands of them as athletes.*

During the actual game Coach Thomas operated a video camera from a higher vantage point and Coach Sommers provided the in-game coaching on the sidelines. Coach Sommers was consistent in mixing the imposing of demands with the providing of support. For example, he would tell athletes "...I need you to support" or "...push up," and he would also say to athletes "...well done, brilliant" or "It's coming men...it's coming." At one point in the game Coach Sommers was intentional about telling two athletes, who he was taking out of the game, "You're not coming out because of something you're doing wrong." He talked to both of these athletes in encouraging ways. Coach Sommers also talked with an athlete before putting him into the game, giving him advice and at times placing a supportive arm around the athlete's shoulders. Coach Sommers was also intentional about demanding that one of the athletes on the bench address his teammate on the field in a positive manner. The athlete on the bench had said something negative, and Coach Sommers was quick to hold the athlete accountable and told him to use a positive tone. Coach Sommers' demand-support balancing act was perhaps summed up in one statement he made to an athlete in the game. He said "you just have to trust me...and know if I am hard on you, it's not personal."

After the game Coach Sommers met with the athletes in the locker room. He said he knew they were unhappy with the score (they lost 3-1), and he wanted them to be unhappy with the score; however, he also wanted them to feel good about their compete level. Coach

Sommers said there is not much difference between the two teams and that they are going to work hard to be ready to face this opponent again in two weeks. He said if they commit to the process and work at it, they will be amazed at what they can become in their time together. In his post-game locker room talk Coach Sommers again displayed evidence of the action plan he and Coach Thomas had committed to following the November 9, 2018 biweekly meeting.

Coach Sommers reinforced an underlying demand of the athletes to pursue excellence by telling them to not be content with the result. Coach Sommers also connected in a positive way with the athletes as individuals by honoring the effort and competitiveness they brought to the game.

The two games I have just referenced were against opponents the same age as the team being coached by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. A third game also took place, but it was a Senior Men's game scheduled between the two previously-discussed games. Coach Sommers was opposed to the scheduling and playing of Senior Men's games because these games did not take place in an 11 v 11 format, and involved adult men who were playing for recreational purposes. In Coach Sommers' opinion, both of these factors conspired to compromise the developmental benefit of such competitions. Coach Thomas was also not a supporter of the Senior Men's games. He said the team had been entered into the Senior Men's league because Coach Sommers' predecessor had requested it, and when Coach Sommers came on board it was too late for the team to back out. Neither Coach Sommers nor Coach Thomas approached the Senior Men's games with a sense of developmental urgency and did not make the games a priority in terms of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. They viewed the Senior Men's games as an opportunity for some of the older members of the group to play

regular games, but both would have preferred to not be a part of them. In reality, only some of the team members participated in the Senior Men's games. Sometimes Coach Sommers played in the games if the team was short of players, and the games took on a significantly different tone than the practices and 11 v 11 games that were central to the academy's mandate for this group of athletes. It is for this reason, that these Senior Men's games have not been included in my description of the team's indoor season.

Despite being happy with the athletes' compete level during the November 22, 2018 game, at the next practice (November 23, 2018) Coach Sommers again placed demands upon the athletes. He brought the athletes in after an early drill and insisted on better quality. He said "if you want to be university players, you have to get used to this...I know you had a game yesterday, but at the university level you will be training the next day." Coach Sommers continued to demand by telling the athletes to be aware of the quality of their passes. In the last drill of the practice Coach Sommers said "you have to finish on a goal, that is always the rule." Coach Sommers insisted on someone scoring to finish the drill. He said, "somebody has got to score."

The demands Coach Sommers displayed in this practice were consistent with part of the action plan he and Coach Thomas had committed to following the first biweekly meeting (November 9, 2018). In that first biweekly meeting, in response to the athletes' views of their indoor season experiences (seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes), both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas aimed to prioritize being demanding of the athletes and challenging the athletes, while at the same time prioritizing the establishment of positive connections with the athletes. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas coached in a manner

consistent with this action plan, and the athletes seemed to resonate in a favorable way with the coaches' approach.

3.1.3.2 Actionable Outcome #2 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Identifying

What the Athletes Needed and Communicating This to the Athletes

November 23, 2018 was the date of the second biweekly meetings I held with the athletes and the coaches. At the beginning of the athlete meeting I again reminded the athletes that we would be meeting as a group for a few minutes near the end of practice every second Friday. I also again reminded the athletes that the purpose of the meetings was to discuss their sport academy experience in the context of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles.

I told the athletes that in our last meeting we focused on the athlete-centred high performance coaching principle of the coach trying to see the sport experience through the athlete's eyes, and, consequently, I had asked them five questions designed to reveal their perceptions of their academy experiences and the way they were being coached, as well as reveal their preferred coaching approach. I told them that today we were going to focus on the athlete-centred high performance coaching principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete.

Adhering to this principle serves to get the coach and the athlete on the same page in terms of where the athlete is developmentally, and an important step in the process is to find out from the athlete where he thinks he is developmentally. To accomplish this task, I distributed a skill self-assessment sheet (See Appendix D) modified from the National Soccer Coaches Association of America Competency Matrix. Coach Thomas had obtained a copy of

this matrix at a coaching workshop and was okay with me using it. I explained to the athletes that, on this sheet, they would sign their name and the date, rate themselves in terms of their development, identify three areas where they most needed to improve, and offer one strategy for each area, within their direct control, which would help them improve in the particular area. I told the athletes that their coaches would look at the athletes' sheets and compare them with the coaches' ratings of the athletes, as a means of generating clear information to talk about. This information would help the coaches explain to the athletes what the athletes needed developmentally and how the athletes could go about pursuing what they needed.

The athletes rated themselves in a variety of sport-specific competency areas relative to how good they thought they could ultimately be. They also wrote down the three competency areas in which they felt they most needed to improve, and wrote down a strategy, within their control, they had for improving in each of those three areas. I mentioned to the athletes that this activity was also part of them taking ownership of their development.

I shared the athletes' ratings information with Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas in the coaches' meeting afterwards and got the coaches' opinion on whether or not the athletes' ratings were accurate. In many cases, the coaches felt the athletes did not accurately gauge their abilities relative to their potential (sometimes the athletes rated themselves too low relative to their potential, and sometimes the athletes rated themselves too high). In almost all areas, the coaches and athletes both agreed that the athletes could get better – there were differences of opinion regarding how much better.

In terms of the competency areas the athletes identified as most needing improvement, the coaches agreed with some and disagreed with others. The coaches also added additional

competency areas they felt the athletes would be best served by improving in. In our meeting, the coaches agreed to a coaching action plan where they would make it a priority to communicate with the athletes regarding what they felt the athletes needed to improve in, and how they felt the athletes could do that effectively. This action plan was consistent with the second athlete-centred high performance coaching principle: the coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete.

I told the coaches that I would provide them with a summary sheet of the athletes' ratings information. It is important to note that the coaches did not want to crush the hopes of the athletes by clearly sharing their opinions regarding the athletes' performance potential ceilings. However, the coaches did want to be realistic about where the athletes were currently situated developmentally and what the athletes needed to prioritize in terms of their training going forward.

In my discussion with the coaches regarding how best a coach could be congruent with his athletes, Coach Thomas referred (not in a supportive way) to a former national level coach who would tell some of the athletes he worked with that they had no chance, as a way of motivating them. Coach Sommers was quite strongly opposed to this approach. He said that brutal honesty might have some merit in an academy developing professional players where millions of dollars are on the line. However, he strongly believed that with the athletes he was working, he wanted to be honest about where they were at and what they needed to work on, but he never wanted to crush their hopes. He wanted it to remain an open question in terms of how good they could become.

The day after the biweekly meeting (November 24, 2018) Coach Sommers sent out an email to the athletes. Reflecting his commitment to the action plan we had discussed on the previous day, part of Coach Sommers' email indicated his desire to meet with the athletes to go over "specific things they can work on." I have included a portion of Coach Sommers email to the athletes.

...I would like to schedule time in the coming weeks somehow to meet with the players individually to go over specific things they can work on. This might have to be something where the players and I coordinate a time separate from our training schedule to meet and chat, ideally it would be the goal to have all the individual meets completed before Christmas break...

Later on in the same email Coach Sommers again displayed his intentionality in trying to establish a personal connection with the athletes. This portion of his email read as follows:

If any of you are unhappy with the way I do things, the way things are going, the way I smell, or just want more clarity on where you feel you stand in the group, find a moment to ask me in person. I know it can be hard to ask tough questions to the coach but that's why [the academy] pays me the big bucks (ha ha).

Seriously though, please have the courage to ask. Firstly it can really help me gain perspective on you as a person and player. I'm imperfect, I don't read every situation correctly, and I'm responsible for a lot of individuals...Secondly, it shows you as a player really care.

During the next practice (November 26, 2018) Coach Sommers demonstrated consistency with the coaching action plan of communicating with the athletes both what he felt they needed to improve on and how he felt that they could do that effectively. Coach Sommers didn't want the athletes to be content with not putting enough pressure on the opponents. He wanted them to have the willingness to want to win. He wanted them to have the desire to want to win. Coach Sommers said if they don't have the desire to want to win in practice, it isn't going to magically appear in a game. He said they have to have pride to want to win in

every competitive situation. Coach Sommers also provided feedback to athletes either in a smaller group, or on an individual basis. For example, Coach Sommers demanded that the one team in a drill play with more energy. He said to them “Blue team, that is too easy, have some PRIDE [he raised his voice at the end of this point].” Coach Sommers also, in one situation, stopped a drill to tell an individual athlete “I need you here [in a particular situation].”

Coach Sommers and I talked after the practice. One of the things we discussed was the issue of athlete effort and the role of the coach in maximizing that effort. I asked Coach Sommers what his experience as a university and professional athlete was like in terms of the effort level of athletes. He said that the most effective thing he experienced with respect to the role of a coach in maximizing athlete effort was a coach making the athlete realize he was replaceable. Coach Sommers said that everything changed once athletes were paid to play. He said with respect to this university-prep group of athletes, he knows he can raise their level of effort by externally motivating them. I was not sure at this point if this was his preference.

Coach Sommers and I also talked about coaching styles during one of the athletes’ Senior Men’s games (November 26, 2018). Coach Sommers referenced a coach who was very demanding but often created situations where his athletes wanted nothing to do with him after their playing careers were over. He said this coach just tossed athletes aside when he felt they had insufficient quality. Coach Sommers felt this coaching approach was problematic. He was not in favor of a coaching approach that left the athletes not wanting to have anything to do with the coach. I suggested that a coach could be demanding but that the demands needed to be based on a positive connection between the coach and the athlete. Coach Sommers agreed with this perspective.

The November 29, 2018 practice took on a unique flavor as the athletes participated in an 11 v 11 intra-squad game. In his pre-game talk with the athletes Coach Sommers displayed consistency with the action plan of being congruent with the athletes. He talked about the “will to compete.” He talked about how he has brought young guys up for this game, and when the team is in “showcase” games (designed to display the athletes’ talents) he is going to play the top 18 – regardless of age. He said “If you’re good enough – you’re old enough.” Through his honest and straight-forward words Coach Sommers was trying to create a sense of urgency and a heightened compete level in the athletes.

During the game, Coach Thomas was again videotaping from up top. He and Coach Sommers talked before the game about what Coach Thomas should be looking for. They also talked about the athletes who weren’t there, and the possibility of one athlete playing in a different position in the intra-squad game, in order to see his capabilities in that position during the game.

During the game, Coach Sommers did not hesitate to be open with his feedback to the athletes. He encouraged the athletes to play fast and press. He pulled an athlete off, in the middle of the game, to coach him on an individual point. At times, Coach Sommers would go right out on the field to make a coaching point. When Coach Sommers talked to the athletes individually they appeared to listen carefully. At one point, Coach Sommers asked a young athlete on the sidelines to draw for him what the athlete saw on the field. On a corner kick Coach Sommers said to an individual athlete “...you’re the biggest guy on the pitch, why are you staying back?” Coach Sommers wanted the athlete to move up to try and score. On another occasion, Coach Sommers said to a young athlete who asked if he would be told when to go in –

“You’re in the big leagues now, I will tell you.” Coach Sommers made this statement with a smile on his face and had his hand on the young athlete’s shoulder when he said it.

It was clear that Coach Sommers was very intentional about teaching the athletes, identifying what they needed to know and communicating that to them. At one point he stopped the game – had the athletes hold their position, and then went out on the field to provide some tactical feedback regarding where they were playing and what they were doing relative to each other. This was a clear indication of Coach Sommers acting consistently with the action plan of being congruent with the athletes. He wanted them to know what needed to be done in a given game situation, and he was willing to actually stop the game to make his point.

At the end of the intra-squad game, Coach Sommers met with all the athletes. His main point of emphasis was that they needed a greater willingness to compete in order to play at a high level. He said “you are too nice to each other.” I made the point to the athletes, after Coach Sommers asked if I had something to say, that what Coach Sommers was talking about was the differentiating factor as far as being able to play professionally. At the highest levels, everyone’s athletic, everyone is skilled, and everyone understands the game. Willingness to compete is one of the things that separates athletes.

One of the unique features of the November 30, 2018 practice was that Coach Sommers was sick on this day and so Coach Thomas ran the entire practice. This gave me an opportunity to watch Coach Thomas in a head-coaching role. Coach Thomas paralleled Coach Sommers in terms of demonstrating coaching behaviours consistent with the action plan of being congruent with the athletes. During a game-simulation passing to shooting drill, Coach Thomas brought

energy to the practice by saying “Can we finish?” Coach Thomas coached while the drill was progressing, saying “think about the angle of our runs...”. Later, Coach Thomas elevated the level of demand by saying “Now that we understand the details, everything needs to be of a high quality...100 percent speed...finish with conviction.” He told the athletes to remember what Coach Sommers had said about the problems created if the first touch is of poor quality – it just leads to more and more poor quality as the play unfolds.

Coach Thomas set up a competition between two groups in a drill. The competitive drill seemed to energize the athletes. Coach Thomas said to the athletes “You need to score to stay on.” Coach Thomas later said, “last minute...yellow, you need a win...blue, you just need a tie.” The athletes seemed to respond to the competitive environment. Though Coach Thomas had no difficulty being congruent with the athletes, he was less animated than Coach Sommers. The athletes appeared to be very receptive to Coach Thomas’ approach.

The next practice (December 3, 2018) was run by both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas with more of a technical emphasis. Near the end of the practice Coach Sommers sat down beside me (Coach Thomas was still on the field with the athletes). Coach Sommers asked me “What drives you?” I told him generativity – the psychological construct of giving back. I told him I was pursuing a Ph.D. degree after finishing a teaching career, but I didn’t mean to be self-serving by saying that. I told him I wanted to learn and I wanted to merge what I had learned together with my experience, to help make sport a positive and affirming experience because I believed sport was fertile ground for being just that. I told Coach Sommers that my passion for doing this was similar to his passion for soccer – and he agreed. Coach Sommers commented how Coach Thomas had a real passion for the game and that he shared that

passion. Coach Sommers thought that today's athletes didn't have that same degree of passion.

After practice, Coach Sommers and I talked a bit about how the research was going. I told him that I had been awakened to the fact that the athletes actually liked being coached in a demanding way provided that a good relationship had been established with the coach – a relationship that indicated the athletes mattered to the coach and the coach was genuinely trying to help them improve. I told Coach Sommers this data related to information I had read that said congruence was a challenging Rogerian principle to isolate in terms of showing a positive influence on people (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). However, it was never Carl Rogers' intention to have any of the Rogerian principles function in isolation – rather the principles were intended to function collectively (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). Therefore, congruence was arguably most effective when partnered with empathy and unconditional positive regard. This perspective seemed to be supported in results from this research. Coach Sommers agreed with this perspective and he and I talked about some other coaches who were demanding, but did not have the coach-athlete relationship emphasized, and consequently found the demanding coaching approach to be less readily received by the athletes.

Coach Sommers also shared that he wanted to complete one-on-one meetings with the athletes by Christmas, but that he was having trouble figuring out how to find the time to do so. His obvious commitment to the importance of these meetings was consistent with the action plan of being congruent with the athletes. He mentioned that he could potentially ask Coach Thomas to run one of the practices independently; Coach Sommers could then talk to the athletes individually one at a time during the practice, because he wasn't anticipating needing

more than a few minutes with each athlete. I told him that meeting with the athletes during practice time was a suggestion I had been planning to make, and I thought he would need no more than two practices to meet with all the athletes. What ultimately ended up happening was Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas brought in guest coaches to run practice so that both of them could meet together with individual athletes.

Coach Thomas ran the next practice (December 6, 2018) and also provided email communication with the athletes later that same day. Coach Thomas was clearly congruent at the beginning of practice by talking to the athletes about the importance of them being focussed and pursuing quality play. He said “eyes” were always on them in terms of their performance level, and that the coaches (he and Coach Sommers) were currently trying to decide who they would take to a “showcase” tournament in April, 2019. The athletes listened carefully to Coach Thomas’ words.

The next biweekly meeting was going to be centred on the athlete-centred high performance coaching principle of the coach acting in the athlete’s best interests. Coach Thomas sent out two emails on December 6, 2018 that showed how consistent the academy’s philosophy was with respect to this principle. The emails showed how the academy was trying to act in the athletes’ best interests by discussing post-secondary opportunities for the oldest academy athletes and also discussing post-secondary identification opportunities for the younger academy athletes. A portion of the first email, targeting the younger athletes, read as follows:

One of our goals with the University Prep Program is to ensure all athletes have the opportunity to attend showcase events in order to be seen by U-Sport and Collegiate recruiting coaches in Canada and the US.

This year, we have the opportunity to attend the...Showcase on April 18-22, 2019. Currently, the showcase already has multiple recruiting coaches attending, which in our experience continues to grow as the date draws nearer. Verbal offers and commitments typically begin to occur in the fall of the athlete's grade 11 year. In preparation for this event, the athletes would begin to create their athlete resumes and recruitment videos. The cost of this event would be \$1500-\$2000 depending on interest. Fundraising events will be considered in order to keep costs down.

The showcase is basically already full, however, we have secured a spot if we can confirm our interest by the evening of Sunday, December 9th...

A portion of the second email, targeting the oldest athletes, read as follows:

As mentioned at training this morning to the 2001's, [Coach Sommers] and I would like each of you to schedule a time to meet with us in the next couple weeks to discuss individualized plans for your transition out of [the academy] and hopefully into a university or college program next season. In preparation for these meetings we will need you to have an idea of what you would be interested in studying and a list of 3-5 schools that offer the program that you're interested in. Most university and collegiate programs begin holding ID camps in the winter or early spring in preparation for the fall so it's important that we start this process ASAP. If you are not intending to pursue university or college next year then we can still discuss potential options for you.

Lastly, a message has been sent out to the 2002-2004 born players regarding the...Showcase event in April. 2001's will not be eligible for this event as most if not all 2001's would already be committed to a post-secondary program. We can also send information regarding individual showcase events if that's of Interest to anyone in the group...

At the end of the final practice (December 7, 2018) before the next biweekly meeting, Coach Sommers brought the athletes in and talked to them about the practice. He was clearly congruent and passionate in his feedback. Coach Sommers spoke about the importance of the athletes recognizing that they are not close to being as good as they can be, and that he is going to push them to get better. He emphasized that when they are under pressure or under duress that they have to respond with positive energy and determination – not negativity. He said it does not serve them well to just think in negative terms about this experience and him as a

coach. Coach Sommers was clear that if he needed to bring up younger athletes who showed promise to replace older athletes who had a bad attitude, he would do it. Coach Sommers also said that he would talk to them individually if he felt they didn't have what it took to get better, but that he felt they all did. He summed up practice by saying it was a positive small step. Coach Thomas also spoke during the end of practice time and was congruent when he said that the athletes' compete factor was coming but that it could still be better.

During the time period between the second and third biweekly meetings Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas displayed an obvious commitment to congruence, not just through their interactions with athletes on the field, but through their determination to make the individual coach-athlete meetings a reality. The individual coach-athlete meetings would prove to be fertile ground for the coaches to not only display congruence in their interactions with the athletes, but to also display intentionality in trying to act in the athletes' best interests and help the athletes pursue their best selves.

3.1.3.3 Actionable Outcome #3 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Acting in the Athletes' Best Interests and Developing Within the Athletes the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Themselves

After the December 7, 2018 practice I had my third biweekly meeting with the athletes. The athlete-centred high performance coaching principle that provided the context for this meeting was the coach acting in the athlete's best interests. I chose to target the athletes' long-term soccer goals for the purpose of providing athlete information to Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas that they could contemplate in considering how to act in the athletes' best interests. I told the athletes that we were going to do a thought experiment where they were

to imagine it was almost four years in the future. I gave them each an index card and asked them to write their real names on the cards (I told them that the only people to see the cards would be myself and the coaches, unless the athletes chose to share them with anyone else). I asked the athletes two questions to answer on the cards, imagining that it was now four years in the future. The first question was “What soccer team are you currently playing for?” and the second question was “What position are you playing?”

After meeting with the athletes I met with Coach Thomas (Coach Sommers had to leave because of work responsibilities). We went over the athletes’ responses – I read the information, and Coach Thomas weighed in on whether he thought what the athletes had written down was realistic. Coach Thomas was well-placed to do this because he had been with most of these athletes for an extended period of time.

Coach Thomas felt that all of the athletes had the potential to play either College or U-Sport soccer, but after hearing the athlete responses to the questions about their soccer future, felt that some of the athletes were overreaching in terms of what level of post-secondary soccer they thought they would be playing. Coach Thomas and I talked about if a coach is going to act in an athlete’s best interests, to what extent does he portray a realistic picture of the athlete’s soccer possibilities, without crushing the dream that may be fueling the athlete’s desire to put in the soccer training work. In general, Coach Thomas felt it was fine for the athletes to have the dream, but that the coaches needed to present to the athletes realistic pathways to the dream (recognizing that any of the steps along the pathway might in fact be the limit for the athletes). I thought Coach Thomas’ perspective was an effective one because it gave the athletes incremental steps to pursue on their path to their hoped for soccer dream.

A specific coaching action plan related to acting in an athlete's best interests was not formalized at this point in time. However, over the next couple of days a specific plan was put in place that also incorporated the athlete-centred high performance coaching principle of developing within the athletes the desire to pursue the best version of themselves. The chain of events leading to this plan started after the December 10, 2018 practice.

After the December 10, 2018 practice one of the athletes approached Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas and expressed his desire to play post-secondary soccer (this athlete was in Grade 12). This athlete was currently recovering from an injury but had a bit of a history of inconsistent commitment and investment of effort. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were very honest with the athlete in essentially saying that his actions had to match his words in terms of his goals as a soccer player – starting with a real commitment to rehabilitating his injury.

After the athlete left, Coach Thomas, Coach Sommers, and I had a fairly lengthy conversation about the balance between not stifling an athlete's dreams and being authentic with an athlete about his future soccer prospects, along with what the coaches think it will take for him to make those prospects a reality. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas felt that most of the academy's oldest players did not have the investment of effort and commitment needed to play at the post-secondary level. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas planned to start the individual coach-athlete meetings during the next practice (December 13, 2018), and they wanted me to join those meetings.

I appreciated being included in the individual coach-athlete meetings and graciously accepted the coaches' invitation. Though I was confident Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas

were genuinely intending to act in the athletes' best interests during the individual coach-athlete meetings, I was feeling a bit uncertain regarding the coaches' willingness to view, in those meetings, the athletes as being in a state of becoming. Consequently, I made the decision to suggest to the coaches an intentional incorporating, in the individual coach-athlete meetings, of a perspective that was consistent with the coach developing within the athletes the desire to pursue the best version of themselves. I made this suggestion through an email I sent to both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

Through the email I was hoping to potentially enhance the effectiveness of the individual coach-athlete meetings by encouraging Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to reflect on the impact they could have regarding the athletes' pursuit of their best selves. I was essentially suggesting that the coaching principle of developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself should accompany acting in the athletes' best interests as part of the action plan for the individual coach-athlete meetings. I wasn't forcing the issue of incorporating the additional principle, but I wanted the coaches to consider its merit. My email read as follows:

Hi Guys,
I hope your day is going well. I just wanted to share a few thoughts I had following our discussion after practice on Monday. It seems to me that the delicate balance is how to be congruent (real and authentic with the players) without extinguishing their dreams. It occurred to me after our conversation that one of the underlying principles behind athlete-centred high performance coaching is the belief that athletes are in a "state of becoming" – they are not in a fixed state. Research from the world of psychology has shown the importance of not placing pre-determined limits on individuals in terms of helping them realize their potentialities.

The application of this in our setting would be to recognize that though we have a pretty good idea of where the players are right now, we can't say for sure what they will become down the road. When we meet with them we could possibly map out for them a path from where they are now to where they want to be, but focus

primarily on the next step in front of them (this idea relates to [Coach Thomas'] comments from Friday of wanting to make players aware of the steps they need to take between where they are and where they want to be; it also relates to [Coach Sommers'] comments from Monday of if a player can even just barely get into a higher-level program – e.g., a college program – perhaps that training environment can accelerate their developmental process).

In North America, I suspect the high performance steps would lead from [the academy] to College to U-Sport to the Canadian Professional Soccer League to the United Soccer League to MLS. Based on the comments you guys have made, none of the players at this point in time are at the College level – this puts them either at the [academy] rung of the ladder or somewhere between [the academy] and College. I think in the player meetings it would be helpful to point out where they are now (being congruent) but it would also be helpful to not unequivocally say what their ceiling is. Rather, the emphasis could be on what does the player need to do to get to the first rung of the ladder (College), or depending on the player, the second rung of the ladder (U-Sport). This way we don't douse the flames of motivation that player dreams can provide, but we provide realistic feedback about where a player is and what he genuinely needs to do to get to the first rung or second rung of the ladder. Mountain climbers can dream of reaching the summit of Everest and do extraordinary things to try and make that a reality – however, they still have to progress through Base Camp 1, 2, 3, and 4.

I think player meetings targeting where they are, and what they need to get to Base Camp 1 (without saying how far we think they will ultimately climb – but leaving that an open question) may be most beneficial in giving the players the “real” feedback they need in order to start getting better right now, but maintain the “hope” in their hearts that may be what keeps them coming out early in the morning. Sorry for the lengthy e-mail. I just wanted to make sure I had clearly explained myself. I want to emphasize that this is not me telling anybody what they should do. I just wanted to put this out there as a possible way to consider approaching the player meetings.

Coach Sommers was in support of my email and sent me the following response:

Mark thank you so much for this email. It is so valuable and I appreciate it. I hope in those discussions Monday I didn't lead you on to believe that I think that I know where a player's ceiling is. My own unique experience as a player...told me that a coach never knows. There is a way to be real/honest and inspire rather than crush so I will definitely try to find that balance in the meetings.

The following is part of my response to Coach Sommers' email:

Hi [Coach Sommers],
I didn't feel like you were placing limits on the players. Rather, I think we were all trying to figure out how to help players not limit themselves. You and [Coach

Thomas] are excellent examples of guys “who put in the work” and I know that both of you are genuinely trying to help your athletes understand what it takes to play at the post-secondary level...

Coach Thomas was also in support of the email I sent regarding the coach-athlete interviews.

He emailed me the following response:

Hi Mark,

Thank you for your insight into this and we will definitely be using this approach tomorrow morning.

Most of the next practice (December 13, 2018) was run by two guest coaches (both of whom had played post-secondary soccer and were known by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas). Coach Sommers, Coach Thomas, and I held individual coach-athlete meetings, starting with the oldest athletes. The purpose of the meetings was for Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to talk with the athletes about the athletes’ post-secondary soccer goals and how the coaches saw the athletes relative to those goals. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas emphasized the concept of a process of becoming in the sense that they conveyed to all of the athletes that the athletes were not in a fixed state, but all capable of improving. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas also acted in the athletes’ best interests by being honest with them about their current soccer realities, without stifling whatever soccer dreams the athletes might possess.

Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas gave the athletes a sense that playing post-secondary soccer was a possibility but were also very real with the athletes about what it would take from the athletes to make that a reality (e.g., commitment to physical training, commitment to extra technical work, commitment to a positive attitude, etc.). The meetings appeared to be very effective in confirming, within the athletes, the hope that they could play

soccer after high school, and also offering definite hands-on feedback concerning the specific things the athletes needed to work on to help make what they hoped would happen a reality.

One of the most poignant moments in the meetings was when Coach Sommers talked to an athlete, in response to the athlete's feelings that maybe he was no longer motivated to play at the next level. In his comments, Coach Sommers encouraged the athlete to not place limits on himself. He encouraged the athlete to go out in training and see how good he could become. Perhaps Coach Sommers was trying to help the athlete discern if he had any motivation for high performance soccer left; and if there was some motivation left, to feel encouraged to act upon it.

In the next practice (December 14, 2018) the coaches brought out a professional MLS soccer player to train with the athletes. This was a great example of incorporating a positive role model – a person who had made it to the level the athletes could dream of making it to. It appeared to be a real source of inspiration and elevated engagement for the athletes. The athletes were all very focused during the practice. At one point during practice, Coach Sommers brought the athletes together and basically said, it is great to have soccer dreams, in fact “dream bigger,” but the athletes have to now put in the work – they have to back the dream with actions.

After practice, Coach Sommers, Coach Thomas, and I met with the one remaining athlete who was eligible to play post-secondary soccer next year (the athlete wasn't at the previous practice when the earlier athlete meetings were held). Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did an excellent job of finding out what the athlete's goals were and then helping him to plot a course (through developmental work on the field, and logistical work in terms of

contacting schools, etc.) to try and help him get from where he was to where he wanted to be. The athlete was given clear feedback, in a supportive way, concerning where he was currently at developmentally and what he needed to do to get better. He was also given the clear reassurance that he could continue to develop in a significant way. Through their meeting with this athlete Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas again showed the willingness and ability to both act in the athlete's best interests and help develop within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself. I think the merging of these principles seemed seamless because the coaches genuinely believed that helping athletes develop the desire to pursue their best selves was acting in the athletes' best interests.

Coach Sommers further exemplified the combination of these principles through comments he made to the athletes following the December 20, 2018 practice, and through an email he sent to me concerning a plan he was thinking about for the athletes. After the December 20, 2018 practice Coach Sommers commended the team for the progress they had made through the first two months of training. Earlier in December, 2018 Coach Sommers had sent me an email seeking my feedback for a plan he was considering implementing for the athletes over the Christmas break. One could see through the words of this email how important it was for Coach Sommers to act in the best interests of these athletes by facilitating their personal development. Coach Sommers' email read as follows

Hey I want to give the players a bit of a homework assignment over the break. I essentially want them to dive into this world a bit deeper and extrapolate more out of it. Below is what I was thinking. Can you let me know what you think?

Reflect on the bullet points below. If the word is new to you google it

Each emotional competency below write out (1) What it means and how it is useful to high performance athletes. (2) How developing more of it betters

you as an athlete. If you are struggling to find a starting point, think about how each concept applies to how you deal with situations that arise in a game and/or training (3) Give an example or scenario of when or how it is useful.

I firmly believe that in sporting environments athletes are constantly tested along their emotional fringes and this gives us such a big opportunity to develop things (ie. Resilience) which makes us better as people transcending the game of soccer. The ultimate double whammy. This little homework assignment will start a foundation of knowledge that will help you in your reflection process.

- Resilience
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Control
- Achievement Drive/Competitiveness
- Self-Confidence
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Optimism

It is optional for them to do I just find value in players self discovery by thinking about these aspects they might not have concretely applied to soccer...

Though to my knowledge Coach Sommers did not end up providing the athletes with this optional assignment, it was obvious he was thinking about ways of helping them develop both athletically and personally.

The time period between the third and fourth biweekly meetings really showcased the emergent nature of PAR. The third biweekly meetings had prioritized the athlete-centred high performance coaching principle of acting in the athlete's best interests. However, as the action plan started taking shape it became readily apparent that the coaching principle of developing within athletes the desire to pursue their best selves went hand-in-hand with acting in the athletes' best interests, at least in the context of the individual coach-athlete meetings. Thus, what started out as a single principle emphasis quickly transformed into a two principle emphasis. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas demonstrated the ability to prioritize both

acting in the athletes' best interests and developing within the athletes the desire to pursue their best selves, and do it in a way that saw the principles effectively meshed together.

3.1.3.4 Actionable Outcome #4 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Embraced the Link Between Imposing Demands and Building Connections

After the Christmas break the biweekly meetings took on a different flavor. The reason for this was that all of the athlete interviews had been completed by early December, 2018, and by the third week in January, 2019, all of the athlete interviews had been transcribed. The athletes were given the opportunity to read the transcription of their interviews, ask questions, and make changes to the content if they wanted to. At the end of this process, if they approved of the transcripts, they signed written consent forms authorizing the use of the individual transcripts. All 20 of the athletes signed the written consent forms authorizing the use of their individual transcripts. I now had at my disposal a wealth of athlete-generated data regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching that could be used in biweekly meetings as a starting point in seeking further clarification from the athletes, and also as a resource upon which to build action plans with the coaches.

In the first practice following the Christmas break (January 3, 2019), I told the athletes that we were going to start doing some work related to the feedback they had provided me in their interviews. At this time not all of the interviews had been transcribed, and I wanted to give all of the athletes the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews at the same time before considering providing informed consent for their release. Therefore, I said to the athletes that until they had the opportunity to provide informed consent for the use of their individual interviews, I would only reference general impressions from the interview data.

In the fourth biweekly meeting (which occurred at the end of the January 3, 2019 practice) I again gave each of the athletes an index card and told them that today I would be asking them two questions that were inspired by general impressions taken from the interview data. I asked them to protect their anonymity by not signing their names, and to answer the questions openly and honestly. I did not provide a context for the questions as I wanted to make sure I was not biasing their responses.

The reason why I asked the questions that I did, was I wanted to see if there was merit to what some of the interview data seemed to be suggesting concerning athlete responses related to feeling connected in a positive way to their coaches. This data seemed to imply that athletes may be more willing to respond favorably to demanding coaching behaviours if the athletes feel their coaches actually cared about them as people and didn't just view them as resources to be used in the service of winning. I didn't tell the athletes this. I simply asked them the following two questions: (a) Please answer yes or no to this question: Are you more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if you feel your coach genuinely cares about you and doesn't just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning?, and (b) What are five things your coach could say or do that lets you know he genuinely cares about you and doesn't just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning?

I met with Coach Thomas after the athlete meeting (Coach Sommers was unable to meet because he was providing an individual skill session for an athlete). I talked with Coach Thomas about how the interview data were pointing in the direction of the high performance athletes desiring demanding coaching behaviours and being more receptive to those demanding coaching behaviours if they felt the coach genuinely cared about them as people. I

shared with Coach Thomas information I had previously shared with Coach Sommers regarding the challenge research in Rogerian principles encountered when trying to isolate congruence from the other principles (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). When isolated, congruence would sometimes have a positive effective, sometimes a mixed positive/negative effect, and sometimes a negative effect. However, as Kirschenbaum and Jourdan (2005) pointed out, Rogers never intended the principles to be separate from one another, and that is possibly why congruence didn't always work well in the absence of empathy and unconditional positive regard. Maybe that is also why demanding coaching behaviours don't work as well when athletes don't feel their coaches genuinely care about them.

Coach Thomas and I talked about the athlete responses to the questions I had given them during the athlete meeting. A total of 87.5% of the athletes answered yes to the question "Are you more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if you feel your coach genuinely cares about you as a person and doesn't just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning?" The athlete responses to the second question (What are things your coach could say or do that lets you know he genuinely cares about you as a person and doesn't just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning?) were as follows:

- *"Spend the extra time helping you"*
- *"Talking/meeting with us off of the pitch. Learning about other things going on in our lives"*
- *"Gives you a good compliment and respectfully tells you what you can do better"*
- *"...Demand and thoroughly explain the situation"*
- *"...They ask how my day is going"*
- *"Yell productive things to do on the pitch"*
- *"Gives you a compliment"*
- *"...Like making sure you are healthy and they build you up before a game"*
- *"If he jokes around with you, or if they ask how your break/weekend was. If they talk about other things in your life"*
- *"Individual feedback/meetings"*

- *“For me personally it’s the side tips and even the yelling and screaming that not only gets me fired up but shows that the coach cares for our success”*
- *“Talks to you about more than soccer ex. other sports your playing”*
- *“Talk with player aside”*
- *“1 on 1 pointers during training”*
- *“Talking/meeting with us off of the pitch”*

Coach Thomas and I made a plan to, together with Coach Sommers (who I planned to talk to about this on January 7, 2019), seek to implement practical action related to this athlete information. I talked with Coach Thomas at the start of the next practice (January 7, 2019). He said he had talked with Coach Sommers about the athlete responses to the “coach caring about me as a person” question from last week. A high percentage of the athletes (87.5%) had stated they would be more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if they felt their coach genuinely cared about them as people and didn’t just view them as resources to be used in the service of winning. Coach Thomas said that he and Coach Sommers wondered if at the highest level of high performance sport the percentage might be closer to 50% because the highest level of sport is an intensely competitive environment that doesn’t prioritize connection.

At the end of the practice, I and the coaches talked about the benefits of what Coach Sommers called the “emotional intelligence” of coaches (being able to establish positive relationships with their athletes). Coach Sommers said that a friend of his, who plays professional soccer, said that the most successful coaches in that league were the ones who could establish a positive relationship with their athletes. Coach Sommers described this “forming a positive relationship with players” as sort of the key ingredient to answering a question he had in his interview with me – “How can you be athlete-centred and still relentlessly pursue winning?” The answer to the question was that the coach is demanding on

the pitch but the athletes are receptive and responsive to the coach's demanding behaviours because they know that the coach genuinely cares about them. Coach Sommers' moment of revelation – this idea that a high performance coach, in his pursuit of winning, can both impose demands on the athletes and build connections with the athletes, and in fact potentially increases the receptiveness and responsiveness of the athletes to his demands by building genuine connections with the athletes, was the precursor to the action that was monitored in the post-Christmas break research experience.

I sought to harmonize the coaching principles of imposing demands and building connections with the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles that had informed the pre-Christmas biweekly meetings and action. In my harmonizing efforts, it became clear to me that two of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles applied directly to the world of a coach imposing demands on the athletes, and the other two high performance athlete-centred high performance coaching principles applied directly to a coach building connections with the athletes.

When a coach identifies what the athletes need and communicates this to the athletes the coach is imposing demands. The coach is saying to the athletes that they can improve the level at which they currently operate and there are specific things they can do to facilitate this improvement. When a coach develops within the athletes the desire to pursue the best version of themselves the coach is also imposing demands. The coach is telling the athletes to not be content with their current developmental level, but strive to become all that they can be.

When a coach sees the sport experience through the athlete's eyes the coach is building connections with the athletes. The coach is connecting with them as people by showing

empathy in relating to their sporting experience on a personal level. When a coach acts in the athletes' best interests the coach is also building connections with the athletes. The coach is trying to create "winning conditions" for the athletes by making decisions the coach hopes will help facilitate their personal success.

Watching how Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas both imposed demands on their athletes and built connections with their athletes occupied a large part of my observational efforts and became the primary lens through which we discussed their coaching experiences. In the January 11, 2019 practice I noticed how both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did a very good job of providing individual instruction during the flow of a collective drill. This individual instruction was something the athletes had expressed they very much value. It appeared to be a key way that coaches build connections with their athletes. After practice, I complimented Coach Sommers about his and Coach Thomas' ability to provide individual instruction in the middle of group activity. I told him that was something the athletes really appreciated. He asked me if his body language was "bad" – meaning too negative. I told him no. I told him that the athletes want him to push them and demand things from them. However, I also told him to use those individualized instruction moments as opportunities to provide the athletes – not just with demands, but also with useful information they could use to help meet those demands. He thanked me for my feedback.

Later in the same day, Coach Sommers sent an email to the athletes that revealed the "imposing demands" component of his coaching approach. Part of the email read as follows:

Hey boys,

As it stands we have 22 players interested in coming to the...[showcase event] in April. I will only travel with 20. So before I make decisions on the two players I will be leaving

behind I want to give any players who are not 100% committed to this the opportunity to back out before I potentially select a half ass committed player over a fully committed player. I need 100% commitment in order to prepare accordingly and give ourselves as a team and as individuals the best chance at achieving the highest standard of performance.

Also, This might mean extra practices leading up to the tournament in which you guys might have to sacrifice other stuff for.

At the end of the day you boys have lofty goals and we won't get you there without the aforementioned levels of effort and sacrifice...

While observing the January 17, 2019 practice I found myself pondering the concept of the zipper effect, referenced in an article looking at how self-compassion and mental toughness are interrelated in elite Canadian women athletes (Wilson, Bennett, Mosewich, Faulkner, & Crocker, 2019). The zipper effect refers to the possibility that two different processes may be balanced effectively to maximize the benefits for an individual. For example, Wilson et al. (2019) stated "Though self-compassion and mental toughness are different processes, if they are used in an effective balance, they have the potential to create optimal mind sets for coping with sport-related difficulty and achieving athletic success" (p. 68).

It struck me that a zipper effect may also apply in explaining how the proper balancing of imposing demands and building connections benefits a high-performance coach in most effectively helping athletes realize their athletic potential. During the January 17, 2019 practice it was apparent that both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, in their interactions with the athletes, were able to flow between imposing a demand and building a connection. For example, at one point Coach Sommers imposed a demand by saying "Guys, if we don't practice with any kind of game-like intensity it isn't going to magically appear." Then, later in the same practice Coach Sommers built a connection by talking individually, in a supportive way, with an

athlete who was recovering from an injury. In fact, earlier in the practice Coach Sommers had brought the injured athlete closer to one of the groups of athletes, because the athlete had moved off by himself to do his rehabilitation work. At one point in the practice Coach Thomas imposed a demand by providing tactical advice after stopping a drill. He told the athletes “...force defenders to make decisions”; “can we find different ways...”. Earlier in the practice Coach Thomas had built a connection by complimenting an athlete for an effective play in a particular drill. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas embraced the link between imposing demands and building connections, and I could see their commitment to this link in the way they coached the athletes.

Imposing demands and building connections were not just athlete-centred high performance coaching principles adhered to by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas during the two-week time period following the fourth biweekly meeting. These coaching principles also became the focus of our conversations. It seemed to me that the phrases “imposing demands” and “building connections” were somewhat easier for coaches to understand, and perhaps easier for coaches to embrace. There was almost an intuitive fit to them that, quite frankly, is somewhat hard to describe. For example, it seems to me that old-school autocratic coaches might have a fair bit of difficulty talking about things like empathy. However, those same coaches may potentially feel much less threatened talking about how they can build connections with the athletes, and how those connections can enhance the development of the athletes and teams. Certainly, the coaching world of imposing demands and building connections became both a source of conversation and a source of reflection for Coach

Sommers, Coach Thomas, and myself. The next actionable outcome discussed is an example of this reality.

3.1.3.5 Actionable Outcome #5 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Reflected on What Was an Appropriate Level of Demand to Impose on High Performance Athletes

The fifth biweekly meeting with the athletes (January 18, 2019) was spent giving athletes time to go over the transcripts of their interviews. No new athlete data was generated at this time for the purpose of informing a coaching action plan. In my fifth biweekly meeting with the coaches I asked for their perspective regarding some general impressions I was gaining from the athlete interviews. I told the coaches that fundamentally we were trying to answer the question “How can a high performance coach most effectively help a high performance athlete realize his potential?” I told the coaches that by high performance sport I meant a focus in training on realizing potential and a focus in competition on winning. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas agreed with this description of high performance sport.

I told the coaches that my general sense from the interview responses was that the athletes were in favor of all four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: the coach sees the sport experience through the athlete’s eyes (empathy); the coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete (congruence); the coach acts in the athlete’s best interests (unconditional positive regard); and the coach develops within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself (a process of becoming). I shared with the coaches that the fact the athletes generally supported all of the principles created an interesting reflective challenge in the sense that some people might view the demanding coaching behaviours associated with congruence and pursuing excellence to be

dichotomous with the coaching behaviours associated with empathy and unconditional positive regard. However, I suggested to the coaches that an academic conceptualization called “the zipper effect” allowed for their co-existence. I discussed how a zipper effect worked, and explained that congruence and pursuing excellence would be located on one side of the zipper within the coaching principle of imposing demands, while empathy and unconditional positive regard would be located on the other side of the zipper within the coaching principle of building connections.

I reminded the coaches that a high percentage of the athletes had said they would be more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if they felt that their coach genuinely cared about them instead of just viewing them as a resource to be used in the service of winning. I told the coaches that high performance athletes want demands placed upon them because they want to realize their potential. However, these athletes also want a genuine connection with their coaches. They want to know that they genuinely matter to the coach, and that their coach cares about them as people.

I mentioned a comment Coach Thomas had made, a few weeks prior, wondering how much athletes at the highest levels of sport would value a positive connection with the coach. Both Coach Thomas and Coach Sommers felt that at the highest level of sport, it is likely there would be a high level of demand from the coach and decreased need from the athlete for connection. I said I thought those high levels of competition would see a very high level of demand placed upon the athletes, but that some level of genuine connection with the coach, even at those very high levels, would help those teams play even better. Coach Thomas agreed and pointed out examples of high level soccer clubs where this was the case. The appropriate

level of demand coaches of high performance athletes should impose was an important topic of reflection for myself, Coach Sommers, and Coach Thomas. I have included three examples of this reflective experience with each example highlighting the reflective thoughts of one of us.

On January 19, 2019 I recorded some reflective thoughts I had regarding the zipper effect that potentially exists involving high performance coaches imposing demands and building connections with athletes. I realized that I had intuitively felt that imposing demands and building connections functioned as an inverse relationship. I had thought that if I increased my demands on someone I would be placing at risk my connection with that person. What these high performance athletes were teaching me was that imposing demands and building connections can co-exist as desired coaching behaviours in the service of producing desired athlete results. An analogy that came to mind was that of two singers singing different parts of the same song (e.g., a soprano and a tenor). The coach is the conductor. The conductor controls the volume of both singers to generate the best harmony. However, just because the soprano is asked to sing louder doesn't mean the tenor automatically sings quieter. Their singing volumes are independent of each other but they are interrelated (the zipper effect) to produce a desired outcome. The conductor controls the volume of both singers in hopes of achieving the desired sound, just like the coaches control how much they impose demands and build connections with the athletes they are coaching, in hopes of achieving the desired athlete outcomes.

The January 21, 2019 practice was run by Coach Thomas. Two unique components of this practice experience served to shine a spotlight on the debate concerning where the appropriate line should be in terms of a high performance coach imposing demands on the

athletes. Early in the practice Coach Thomas had the athletes divide themselves into two teams for a competition. Letting the athletes decide who goes on which team meant that one athlete was going to be selected last. Pedagogical expert opinion in motor skill education argues against this type of scenario because of the harm it can do to a person's sense of self-worth (Rink, 2014). I planned to ask Coach Thomas about this after practice.

Later in the same practice, Coach Thomas said that it was up to the athletes how they would divide their bigger group into smaller groups for each competitive event. Coach Thomas also left it up to the athletes to decide if they would have more athletes in a competitive event than the event required and who would be left out of a competitive event. This again created a situation where athletes may be singled out by their teammates as not being considered sufficiently skilled.

After practice I visited with Coach Thomas about the philosophy of having athletes put in situations where they would know how their teammates felt about their abilities (e.g., being picked last for a team, or being left out of a competitive drill by their group). I told him I was asking him his thoughts on the topic, free of judgment. He felt that this type of athlete realization was part of the demanding nature of high performance sport. He said the important part was what an athlete did with the information – did he resolve to work hard to improve to change his standing relative to his teammates, or was he not willing to put in the work and simply resigning himself to his position on the team? Coach Thomas said that some athletes he has worked with in the past took the second option. I said it was an important conversation to have, because I felt there was definitely a clear differentiation between high performance sport and other forms of sport, and that awareness of where you stand as an athlete goes with the

territory in high performance sport. Though, I must admit that, upon further reflection, the educator and parent in me somewhat cringed at the thought of athletes being singled out by their peers as not being good enough. I think it is fair to say that on this point the level of demand Coach Thomas was willing to impose on the athletes was one that exceeded my comfort level.

On January 23, 2019 Coach Sommers sent an email to the athletes that also shone a spotlight on the debate concerning where the appropriate line should be in terms of a high performance coach imposing demands on his athletes. The topic of the email was the balance between school and soccer, and the timing of the email coincided with the athletes' first semester high school exams. It appears, through the wording of his email, that Coach Sommers demanded high performance student athletes prioritize both their education and their sport.

Here is part of the email:

...Balancing school and soccer is something you need to learn to do in the university level. At that level you can't decide to not show up for a week of training because of school. At some point along the line one or the other will give, you either excel at soccer and fail school or vis versa. But I wanna say it doesn't have to be like that... Excelling at both makes you a better person for anything you want to do in life after soccer. Being a student athlete is rewarding, probably my most profound experience with sport and it is about maximizing your potential in both, not sacrificing one for the other. This takes a considerable effort and focus on certain principles like discipline, commitment and prioritizing.

***I will not punish anyone for missing soccer for school, never, in fact I would like to do the opposite if there is any player not keeping up in school and failing, I won't allow them to train. (Parents can update me if you see fit and we can go case by case basis)

The point is you all have the capacity to reap the rewards of the student athlete experience. The only question is do you want it bad enough. I'm happy either way! My job is to co-create you're journey. Your job is to decide what that journey looks like. Now, it doesn't mean everyone here needs to want to go play university soccer. Not everyone will. But if not there is still so much value in our

program. If you dedicate yourself to the aforementioned principles regardless of what your calling in life is after this you will be better prepared for it. Discipline, commitment etc will carry you through whatever endeavour you choose...

This email from Coach Sommers, and Coach Thomas' perspective displayed in the previous practice, are both products of reflection, within Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, regarding what is the appropriate level of demand a high performance coach should impose on his athletes. Though it was not the mandate of this study to determine the exact appropriate level of demand, it appears that the appropriate level of demand is fluid, depending upon the nature of the sport, the level of the competition, and the dispositional reality of the athlete. Despite this apparent fluidity, research into coaching practices does point to one clear line that should not be crossed by coaches in terms of their level of demand. An awareness of this line made up the next actionable outcome.

3.1.3.6 Actionable Outcome #6 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Committed to Being Mindful to Not Cross the Threshold Between Imposing Demands and Coach Emotional Abuse

Though the athletes didn't realize it, I made the focus for the sixth biweekly meeting (February 1, 2019) coach emotional abuse. The problem of coach emotional abuse is a negative reality of high performance sport that is drawing more and more research attention. As mentioned in the literature review, Stirling and Kerr (2008a) defined emotional abuse, in the context of the sport environment, as "A pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful" (p. 178). The coach-athlete relationship in a high performance setting is that type of critical relationship. Ghervis, Rhind, and Lazar (2016) claimed that humiliation, threats, belittling, and shouting were the most prevalent types of emotional abuse identified in the sporting world. Stirling and Kerr

(2008a) pointed out that a coach denying attention and support can have arguably the most negative psychological impact on athletes, because this lack of attention essentially communicates to the athletes they are no longer worthy of the coach's time. In a critical coach-athlete relationship this type of coach dismissiveness can significantly compromise the athlete's feeling of self-worth.

I chose to focus on the emotionally abusive coaching behaviours of rejecting, humiliating, and belittling athletes as the target for this round of biweekly meetings. I left out shouting and threats because in high performance sport coaches may at times be loud and animated in their feedback without intending to humiliate, belittle, or reject. In high performance sport coaches may also threaten athletes in a way that is not humiliating, belittling, or rejecting. This occurs when high performance coaches create a sense of urgency in their athletes by making it clear, as Coach Sommers pointed out, that the athletes' playing time is always in a vulnerable state. When it comes to humiliating, belittling, or rejecting athletes there is no grey area. Coaches who engage in these types of behaviours on a consistent basis are emotionally abusing their athletes. Emotional abuse not only potentially compromises the athletes' performance (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2008b), but more importantly, places the athletes' emotional well-being at risk (Stirling & Kerr, 2014).

In my biweekly meeting with the athletes I gave them the following scenario to respond to (they each had paper and a pen): "Imagine you are in a very tough, physical match where there is a lot of battling and your courage as a player has dropped somewhat. Your coach also feels that your courage as a player has dropped. What could your coach say to you at halftime that would help you play with more courage in the second half?" In my opinion, this was the

type of scenario where emotionally abusive male coaches may take a harmful approach.

Tibbert, Andersen, and Morris (2015) described one potentially harmful coaching approach when they spoke unfavorably about coaches who “...endorse the hyper-masculine subculture typified by slogans such as no-pain-no-gain, rest-is-for-the-dead, and man up...(p. 69).” I wanted the athletes to respond without signing their names, and I wanted to see if, in their responses, they would write down any comments that suggested they would be okay with their coach saying something that could potentially humiliate, belittle, or reject them.

In response to the scenario I presented them, the athletes said they wanted their coach to interact with them in the following ways:

- *“Your doing great just keep working as hard as you can”*
- *“It’s your game”*
- *“You got this or you take these guys”*
- *“Play your game and play to win”*
- *“Play your game, not the opponents game”*
- *“Let’s go go body these boys”*
- *“My coach could say, don’t focus about what is going on outside of the game, focus on the game and be a leader, motivate the team”*
- *“You’re gonna get less hurt going full into tackles, and more hurt going in weakly”*
- *“Don’t let them win”*
- *“Don’t be a pussy. Be physical back. If he is playing dirty, I should be allowed to play dirty”*
- *“Something motivational and call me out tell me what not to do”*
- *“Your not yourself right now. I know you are better and just relax out there”*
- *“Praise the team tell me just to go and play with no worry”*
- *“He can say to me that I’m a leader, start playing like one, be the best that you can be”*
- *“Nothing specific, but remind me about how much is on the line”*
- *“...In the match I can [be] brave and helpful for all of my teammates...”*

In only two (12.5%) of the responses did the athletes clearly suggest they would be okay with their coach saying something that could potentially humiliate, belittle, or reject them (“Don’t be a pussy.” “...call me out...”). I didn’t provide the athletes with my rationale for asking the

question because I didn't want to bias their responses. The athletes' responses to the scenario raised the possibility that most are likely opposed to coaching feedback that humiliates, belittles, or rejects them.

In my meeting with the coaches I introduced the concept of coach emotional abuse in the following way: though imposing demands and building connections seem to function as independent processes, if imposing demands crosses over a threshold into what is described in the coaching literature as emotional abuse, then building connections, athlete well-being, and athlete performance can be compromised. The threshold between imposing demands and emotional abuse is crossed when a coach resorts to behaviours that include, among others, humiliating, belittling, and rejecting athletes. These coaching behaviours can be devastating for an athlete and are not part of what it means to be an athlete-centred high performance coach.

Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas agreed that a coaching emotional abuse threshold existed and that it could be problematic. We all agreed that the location of the threshold varied depending on the athlete and the level of the sport. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas agreed to focus on being aware if any of their coaching behaviours humiliated, belittled, or rejected their athletes over the next two-week period. I reassured the coaches that I was only bringing up the topic of coach emotional abuse because it was part of the coaching literature, not because I had witnessed emotionally abusive coaching behaviours being demonstrated by them. The coaches were completely fine with me bringing it up, and actually reflected on a couple of comments they had made to individual athletes in the just completed practice. The coaches meant the comments in a light-hearted way but wondered if the comments may have been received by the athletes in a more belittling way. We planned to

touch base in two weeks to see how their committed heightened awareness in this area affected their coaching experience.

During the next practice (February 4, 2019) Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas flowed between imposing a demand and building a connection, without crossing the threshold into coach emotional abuse. One of my comments to the coaches after practice was that it is important all of the athletes realize that when the coaches are singling out one athlete for feedback, that feedback could apply to any athlete in a similar situation, and therefore all of the athletes should be listening carefully. With the current two-week focus on coach emotional abuse, I was thinking that if an athlete realizes that all individual feedback could eventually apply to everyone, the athlete singled out may be less likely to experience the singling out as humiliation, belittlement, or rejection. At the current time, I did not share this thought with the coaches.

I did share with the coaches my recommendation that when they are frustrated or irritated they shouldn't stop coaching the athletes. That way the athletes can keep learning. In my mind I was thinking that if the coaches get frustrated or irritated and stop coaching and start sulking or pouting or not communicating, their actions might be interpreted by the athletes as rejection. At the current time, I did not share this thought with the coaches but I did return to it in a later conversation with Coach Sommers.

The athletes had an 11 v 11 game scheduled for later in the week, and Coach Sommers contacted me regarding how to most effectively handle roster selection for the game. Coach Sommers was not going to be selecting every athlete to participate and he was wondering how best to manage the roster selection process in terms of the athletes who were not being

selected for the game. In my opinion, Coach Sommers' sensitivity to the impact of the selection process was indicative of him not wanting athletes to feel rejected.

I said it was important for these athletes to continue to be viewed as being in a process of becoming, and, consequently, to be given concrete, helpful alternatives if they weren't playing in the game. Coach Sommers agreed with this perspective and I complimented him on the athlete-centred perspective he was bringing to this roster selection situation. An email sent the next day by Coach Sommers to the athletes was influenced by our conversation. I have provided a portion of the email:

...I have selected [the athletes] that will be involved in the game day squad. Parents please be advised there is absolutely no guaranteed playing minutes during the...[game].

We booked [a]...(hard court) at the...Soccer Centre. [Another coach] will run a session with training games for the ...U15s and U17s.

Players not in the [game day] squad will have one of three options two of which hold extremely high value. The first would be to bring indoor boots, and take part in the training session on the hard court making a effort to hone your skills and ability in a small sided game environment. The second option is to sit on the bench and support your teammates. The third option, we see as the most undesirable option, not show up at all...

About an hour after the actual game (February 7, 2019) Coach Sommers asked me for feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of his coaching. I told him that he and Coach Thomas were impressive in their ability to both impose demands and build connections. I also told him that one area of his coaching, that I had noticed earlier in our time together, may cause problems if it moved further down the continuum. This area involved Coach Sommers sometimes getting quiet and not coaching his athletes (instead, just sitting down on the bench and not saying anything). I said that in this situation the athletes are no longer benefiting from

his coaching and may feel an experience of rejection. Coach Sommers agreed with this assessment and I think he hoped to guard against it.

During the next practice (February 8, 2019) I talked with the athletes about the coach-athlete connection in the context of coach emotional abuse. I wanted to offer them some things to think about that could possibly help them in the presence of intense high performance sport coaching. I shared how high performance coaches will impose demands but will be mindful of trying to not cross the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse. I told the athletes that coaching behaviours that are intended to humiliate, belittle, or reject the athletes are examples of behaviours that have crossed over that threshold and can not only compromise athlete performance but also potentially compromise athlete psychological well-being. I also told the athletes that their coaches were very mindful of trying not to cross that threshold.

“Teachable moments” was another thing I talked to the athletes about. One scenario, in high performance sport, where a teachable moment may exist is a situation where an athlete is a repeat offender in terms of mistakes he is making. The athletes needed to understand that in that scenario their coach is trying to teach them (even if in an intense and singling out kind of way), and not trying to humiliate, belittle, or reject them. I also mentioned to the athletes that every athlete should think of the teaching the coach is providing (even if directed at an individual athlete) as also applying to them, should they be in a similar situation. I told the athletes that recognizing high performance coaches will impose demands, and viewing the high performance coaches’ interaction as teaching and not humiliation, belittlement, or rejection, will help the athletes to survive and thrive in the high performance sport environment.

Coach Thomas was not at this practice and at one point Coach Sommers was running some type of possession drill. He intensely reminded the athletes to communicate more, and, ironically, in light of my earlier talk with the athletes, singled out one athlete to increase his communication – though the lesson applied to everyone. Coach Sommers again flowed back and forth between the imposing of demands and the building of connections. For example, just after practice ended, Coach Sommers talked to an individual athlete who had been struggling earlier in the season with his confidence. Coach Sommers complimented him and said “[You’re taking it to the]...next level.”

The February 14, 2019 practice was unique in the sense that there was a college coach observing practice with the intention of scouting athletes and establishing more formal connections between the college and the academy. This unique reality, in a way, put the athletes and the coaches on display and I was interested to see how the athlete-centred coaching principles stood up in this type of performance cauldron.

At the start of the practice, Coach Sommers said, jokingly, to one of the senior athletes, in front of the group and the college coach, “...don’t shit the bed.” He then later light-heartedly said, in front of the group and the college coach “01’s [meaning the oldest athletes in the academy], don’t let us down.” The college coach smiled at both comments and Coach Thomas told the college coach that it was “just another day in the pressure cooker with [Coach Sommers].”

Coach Sommers ran the practice while Coach Thomas talked with the college coach. Being watched by a college coach was an interesting challenge for the athletes, and I think it was hard for them to focus on the process. The presence of the college coach also seemed to

affect Coach Sommers in terms of ratcheting up his desire to have the athletes display a high level of proficiency. Some indicators of this possible effect on Coach Sommers were as follows: In the first drill Coach Sommers stopped the drill and called for intensity. He wanted the intensity to come from the athletes and said “I’m not going to yell at you guys today.” Later, after finding out the score in the drill, Coach Sommers said to one group of athletes “Holy shit Reds, you guys fucking suck.” At a further point Coach Sommers got upset with the athletes and said “...it’s a transition game, wake up! We’re wasting this guy’s [meaning the college coach’s] time!”

Coach Sommers seemed to regain his athlete-centred footing later in the practice. For example, at one point in the practice he complimented an athlete for making an important tactical point. He said to the group that the athlete had provided a better analysis than Coach Sommers did. While Coach Sommers continued to impose demands he was also intentional about helping individual athletes. For example, after one drill he provided individual instruction for an athlete. In addition, when an athlete asked Coach Sommers between drills, about where he was supposed to be tactically, Coach Sommers gave him a genuinely connected response. It seemed that during this time of emphasis on coach emotional abuse both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas stayed below the emotional abuse threshold with the exception of Coach Sommers during the practice involving the college coach. However, even in that situation, Coach Sommers negative feedback was episodic and not continuous, which, consequently, left it outside the realm of coach emotional abuse.

3.1.3.7 Actionable Outcome #7 – Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas Became More Athlete-Centred as a Result of the PAR Study

The most significant actionable outcome that occurred during the exploration stage of the study was a shift in both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas toward a more athlete-centred way of viewing high performance coaching. For Coach Sommers it was a more dramatic shift as he began to, for maybe the first time, consider the benefits of relational competence in the context of high performance coaching. For Coach Thomas the shift represented a return to a way of coaching he had previously prioritized but had drifted away from.

An early indicator of this shift on the part of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas occurred during the week of December 5, 2018. On December 5, 2018 I received an email from Coach Sommers asking me if I would consider presenting, to other academy coaches, the current information emanating from the research. Part of his email read as follows

...What my goal is would [be]...to develop...an [academy] Player Centered Approach Coaching Model. Working alongside you, [Coach Thomas] and I feel so strongly that if we were able to build a document we could then use it to educate our coaches and parents as to how this model will make our coaches and players and overall academy better. You know the value in what your doing and we certainly do and we want to steal that wisdom...

My initial thoughts would be to build a short document with you which our Academy could adhere to. Use it to consistently educate our coaching staff at [the academy].

I was both appreciative and supportive of Coach Sommers' suggestion, and plans were made to discuss this possible initiative. Coach Thomas and I also talked about the athlete-centred coach education initiative later in the same week. We agreed it was something that we were all going to look at and work on collectively. The fact that this coaching presentation was coach-

initiated, and not researcher-initiated, was an indication that an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was resonating with both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

On January 3, 2019 I asked Coach Thomas if he was okay with me starting to put together an athlete-centred high performance coaching presentation package (based on my literature review and the current athlete interview data) to present to other academy coaches. My request was in response to Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas' wishes from before the Christmas break that more formal athlete-centred high performance coaching information be put together by all three of us and presented to the other academy coaches. Coach Thomas was very much in favor of me initiating the putting together of presentation material, and, by January 18, 2019 plans were finalized between myself and Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to create an athlete-centred high performance coaching presentation.

The reality of the presentation-creation experience was that I did the work of putting the foundational information together for the presentation and then presented this information to Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas for their feedback. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did not ask to be part of the accumulation of presentation material and seemed comfortable with being able to simply review the material and provide feedback.

On February 1, 2019 I went over a summary sheet with Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas detailing my current general impressions of the research in the context of preparing the coaching presentation. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were supportive of what I had written. The foundational information (see Appendix E) for the presentation (which was delivered in a power point format) was finalized by the time the athletes began their February break (February 16, 2019). The foundational information essentially summarized what Coach

Sommers, Coach Thomas, and I had learned to that point in time about athlete-centred high performance coaching through the previously described athlete perceptions and coach action plans.

The process of putting together this coaching presentation would not have been possible if Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were not fully invested in an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The fact that they felt so strongly about sharing the approach with their colleagues indicated that athlete-centred high performance coaching had become much more than a research study for them. It appeared that they were now viewing it as a viable, and perhaps, necessary way to coach in a high performance setting.

The actual coaching presentation took place on March 21, 2019. The coaching presentation made possible the sharing of athlete-centred high performance coaching principles with a wider audience of coaches. Though, as a product of the actual presentation, some other coaches were now exposed to athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, no preliminary or follow-up research plans were made to monitor additional coaches in terms of their views of athlete-centred high performance coaching. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas remained the actionable outcome focus of the study.

Though the initiation and creation of a coaching presentation was the first strong indicator that Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were gravitating toward a more athlete-centred high performance coaching paradigm, further confirmation of this shift occurred through the guided reflexivity responses Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas provided at the end of the study. As mentioned earlier, guided reflexivity is a researcher-initiated technique

designed to promote reflection in collections of people (Konradt et al., 2015). It provides time, space, and specific prompts to facilitate the group's reflective work (Gabelica et al., 2014).

On February 15, 2019 I met with the coaches and asked them if they were okay with going with guided reflexivity (I explained what it was) as opposed to second interviews for the retrospective part of the research. The coaches were supportive of this approach. I told the coaches that, in reality, they were the focus of the study's action and they would also be the sustainable part of the study's action. How they were affected by the research experience, and how that effect would translate into their future coaching practices, would be the primary actionable outcomes of the study. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were supportive of me viewing them as the focus of the action and the sustainability of the action.

I also sent Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas an email as a means of framing the guided reflexivity. Part of my email described what I hoped to gain from their reflective work, and outlined how it fit into the broader purposes of the research. I am including a portion of the email in hopes of conveying some of the context in which the coaches' guided reflexivity took place.

Hi Guys,

...The research is now at the stage where what I am hoping to get from you guys are some reflective thoughts regarding the impact of the research experience on you as coaches...

This isn't intended to feel like a homework assignment. The goal of action research is to hopefully create what is called "the force of example." What that means is that, by telling the story of our collective experience, people look at it and think that maybe this approach might work if they are in similar circumstances, or people look at it and think this is stuff upon which they can build future research. Three of the key measuring sticks for the worthiness of action research are community engagement (did we do this together), actionable outcomes (specific things we did), and project sustainability (will at least some of what was done sustain into the future beyond the

life of the research experience). As I mentioned to you guys in the past, the two of you are the actionable outcomes. If the action research was something like inner city renewal, the actionable outcomes might have been things like new infrastructure and community policies designed to benefit the disadvantaged. In the case of this research, the actionable outcomes are two human beings, coaches who will potentially impact the lives of many athletes for many years.

Consequently, the impact of this research experience on the two of you is an essential part of what I will be sharing with people. To do that properly I have to honour what the impact has actually been, and that's why I am providing you with these questions. Don't feel like you have to answer them overnight...I will just list the questions below. Write as much or as little as you want to, and please let me know if you need any further clarification.

1. In what ways, if any, has this research experience confirmed what you already believed to be true regarding high performance coaching?
2. In what ways, if any, has this research experience changed what you believed to be true regarding high performance coaching?
3. What do you feel are the most important elements of high performance coaching that this research experience has addressed?
4. Are there necessary elements of high performance coaching that you feel are inconsistent with the direction this research experience is pointing coaches?
5. As you think ahead to your future high performance coaching experiences, in what ways, if any, will this research experience influence the way you coach?

Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were very willing to do this reflective work and in our final de-briefing meeting they shared, both verbally and in writing, how they had been impacted by the research experience. Both coaches were very appreciative of the time we were able to spend together and felt that the experience had produced a positive effect on their approach to coaching.

Coach Sommers said he felt it might take him 15-20 years to fully realize how he had been influenced by our time together. Coach Thomas said that the research experience triggered memories of the core coaching principles he had valued so greatly when he started

his coaching career. He said that back then he had always emphasized generating a positive connection with his athletes and felt that this earlier relational emphasis had actually produced the most significant athlete developmental results. Coach Thomas felt that over the years he had learned considerably more about the sport but had become more of a transmitter of knowledge as opposed to a coach who genuinely communicated and connected with his athletes. He was now committing himself to a return to those initial principles because he had been reminded, through this research experience, how beneficial they were.

As I mentioned earlier, the two primary actionable outcomes of this action research are Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. They are two men who are arguably going to coach for the next thirty plus years. Consequently, they will be influencing the sport experience of potentially thousands of athletes. How this action research experience has affected them and their approach to coaching captures its long-term sustainability. Without question, the best way to understand that effect is to hear directly from Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. What follows are their responses to the guided reflexivity questions.

Coach Sommers

1. In what ways, if any, has this research experience confirmed what you already believe to be true regarding high performance coaching?

With respect to the high performance sport world, this research has confirmed with me the importance of building relationships with players. Insofar, I would say it has shown me that it is of greater importance than the task competent side of coaching.

My core philosophy is that through sport coaching you can teach principles to players that help serve them beyond the sport and in life. I hold the psych-social pillar of coaching as the utmost important. This research experience has confirmed with me that this is a positive approach and it has actually better equipped me with tools to better execute this.

2. In what ways, if any, has this research experience changed what you believed to be true regarding high performance coaching?

This research has opened my eyes into the true value of what it means to embrace a player (athlete) centered approach to coaching. It allows me to understand it more thoroughly by breaking it down into the 4 pillars. What has changed fundamentally in my thinking is that in high performance coaching I now see that there is a greater emphasis on the relational competence. If I were to compare task competence vs relational competence at the beginning of the research project I would have held "task competence" in much higher regard. What I originally may have thought of as being a "soft" coach, I now think of...as an "emotionally competent" coach. I used to think "task demands" vs "building connections" were mutually exclusive. I now know that you absolutely do not need to compromise "imposing demands" (as Mark uses it). I would say quite confidently that as a coach you can do the opposite. In fact you can increase your task demands on players as you build stronger connections.

3. What do you feel are the most important elements of high performance coaching that this research experience has addressed?

The research and the whole experience frankly has given me a new confidence in coaching high performance athletes. It has given me confidence to adhere to Mark's pillars in an effort to give athletes the best opportunity at achieving their best self in soccer.

I think the research has answered a lot of key pieces of information for me. It has broadened my knowledge and narrowed my focus on the emotional competence of a coach.

The golden piece that the research showed me was the fact that the relationship between being a highly demanding coach and a very relationally competent coach is not mutually exclusive. Being a soft coach doesn't mean you compromise being highly competitive and highly demanding, it just means you need to be equally highly relationally competent.

4. Are there necessary elements of high performance coaching that you feel are inconsistent with the direction this research experience is pointing coaches?

No.

5. As you think ahead to your future high performance coaching experiences, in what ways, if any, will this research experience influence the way you coach?

I will be forever grateful for the past 7 month experience. The action research has thoroughly impacted me moving forward. My goal as a coach is to teach kids principles that give them success in the high performance world and in life. Adopting a holistic player centered approach using Mark's pillars of emphasis I think I am 100% better equipped at accomplishing my goal with athletes. The "process of becoming" (as Mark says) is something I have also whole heartedly adopted in my methodology. I think the athlete-coach relationship can be described as the journey of becoming. A coach needs to find a certain level of humility to foster the relational competence necessary to show the player that both...are on the journey together. This research has made sense of words, and concepts which I have read or heard at coaching workshops. I have been able to make a connection with them in a way that I experienced the benefit. I think these methods will stay with me for the rest of my coaching life and hopefully impact me with positive outcomes with the people I coach moving forward.

Coach Thomas

1. In what ways, if any, has this research experience confirmed what you already believed to be true regarding high performance coaching?

I think that this research experience has helped reaffirm the human element behind coaching, even at the high performance level. When I started off as a young coach I didn't have a lot of experience so I relied a lot on my ability to connect with players. As time went on and I attended more and more coaching courses, I felt like there was a shift away from connecting with players and more towards impressing players and parents with the coaching knowledge that I was trying to pass on. I think that deep down, when I think back to the players that I've had the biggest impact on, these athlete-centred characteristics that have come out in this research were always present, I just didn't have a way to define them.

2. In what ways, if any, has this research experience changed what you believe to be true regarding high performance coaching?

I don't think that the research has really changed any of my prior beliefs regarding high performance coaching but maybe that's because it's difficult to think back to 6 months ago and remember how I defined high performance coaching. I think that all of the findings in this research make sense to me when I align them with my own experiences as a person who has had coaches at both ends of the athlete-centred approach spectrum. With that being said, the research has certainly helped to define and put a name to coaching characteristics

and practices that I have observed in other highly regarded coaches as a coach myself, and also as a former player.

3. What do you feel are the most important elements of high performance coaching that this research experience has addressed?

I feel that the relational-competence aspect is the most important element of high performance coaching that this research has addressed. Most people would already expect a high performance coach to have a strong task-competence but I think that very few people give much attention to the coaches' ability to develop meaningful relationships with their athletes. Thinking back to my own playing experiences, the coaches who were able to relate to us as players were always the ones that made the biggest impact on my own personal development.

The other element that I feel is so crucially important is when high performance coaches are congruent with their athletes. I think it can sometimes be difficult to have these real and authentic conversations with athletes, especially in situations when you know the information could be difficult for the athlete to digest, but this research has suggested that this is a positive step in helping an athlete reach their full potential.

4. Are there necessary elements of high performance coaching that you feel are inconsistent with the direction this research experience is pointing coaches?

I really wish I could provide some sort of critical feedback for this question but the truth is that the findings of this research resonate with me and from what I have experienced it seems like these elements form a "recipe for success."

5. As you think ahead to your future high performance coaching experiences, in what ways, if any, will this research experience influence the way you coach?

I recently began working with a new group of athletes in the academy and I've been able to put a lot of these findings to good use. I think that in the past I've approached coaching a new group with the primary goal of trying to prove my task-competence to gain buy-in and respect. With the new group that I've began to work with I've placed a heavy emphasis on trying to build meaningful relationships and really trying to view the training experience through their eyes.

One can see by the comments of both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas the degree to which the research experience affected them. In some ways it seems like, in pursuit of

exploring an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas experienced a six step journey that transformed their thinking regarding high performance coaching. I chose to visually represent their journey as ascending steps (see Figure 3.1). Each step seemed to take them further and further along in a gradually evolving experience of athlete-centred understanding. Without question, and with their own responses as evidence, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas emerged from the PAR experience committed to a more athlete-centred approach to high performance coaching.



Figure 3.1 A Six Step Journey Towards a More Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach

The May 10, 2019 guided reflexivity session with Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas marked the official end of the PAR study. It had been a remarkable journey filled with a diverse array of experiences. Without question, the most encouraging element of the experience was how favorably received an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was by both the coaches and the athletes. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas took it upon themselves to

attempt to actualize an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Their efforts in this regard made the exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach possible. The feedback about the approach, provided by the athletes, coaches, and myself, could essentially be immediately integrated into the coaching experience. By allowing themselves to be the “guinea pigs” in this research experience, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas not only made it possible for an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach to be explored, but also made it possible for themselves to be potentially changed as coaches – a change they both claimed occurred.

3.2 DISCUSSION

The two most striking revelations to emerge from this research study were that the high performance athletes valued and resonated with all of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, and that the high performance athletes overwhelmingly voiced support for the fact that if they felt their coach genuinely cared about them as people, they were more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours. I must admit that the first revelation caught me a bit by surprise. I anticipated high performance athlete support for connection-building coaching behaviours like seeing the sport experience through the athletes’ eyes and acting in the athletes’ best interests. However, I did not anticipate the passionate athlete support for the demanding coaching behaviours like being congruent and pushing and challenging athletes to pursue their best selves.

High performance sport is different than other realms of sport in its prioritizing of pursuing athlete excellence and competitive success (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). The high performance athletes in this study seemed to embrace this reality, provided they felt they

mattered to the coach. The coaches also embraced this high performance sport reality and were particularly affected by the zipper effect (Wilson et al., 2019), a combination potency that appeared to exist with respect to the coaches' demanding and connecting behaviours. The coaches came to resonate with the very real possibility that if they brought relational competence to their way of interacting with the athletes, they could still be very competitive and demanding as coaches and, in fact, could potentially derive a greater competitive benefit.

Athlete-centred coaching literature certainly validates the athletes' support of the connection-building coaching behaviours. For example, greater athlete empowerment (Preston, 2013) and enhanced athlete leadership (Clarke, Smith, & Thibault, 1994) are two athlete benefits derived from coaches being more sensitive to the athletes' realities. Athlete-centred coaching shares common ground with a more humanistic approach to coaching, and the coaching literature provides examples of high performance athletes valuing the humanistic efforts of their coaches (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014).

Athlete-centred coaching supports almost a coach-athlete partnership where, according to de Souza and Oslin (2008), the athletes share with the coaches the responsibility for their personal and collective performances. For example, Stirling and Kerr (2014) advocated for coaches possibly giving more power to athletes. Stirling and Kerr (2014) said this enhanced athlete power might involve an expanded athlete role in the coaches' decision making, which could, when coupled with open coach-athlete communication, elevate the mutual respect coaches and athletes felt for each other. Thus, athlete-centred coaching brings with it an athlete-directed feel that is certainly inconsistent with the more coach-directed approach used by many high performance sport coaches. A coach-directed approach is evident in the

identified characteristics of highly successful high performance coaches (Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017). Lara-Bercial and Mallet (2016) showed that, though possessing an athlete-centred mindset, serial winning professional and Olympic coaches still maintained and accessed final decision-making power.

One could logically anticipate that coaches in the more coach-directed high performance sport world might be hesitant to openly embrace the more athlete-directed nature of athlete-centred coaching. However, the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach introduced and explored in this particular study offers a unique athlete-centred approach to the high performance coaching world. The athlete-centred high performance coaching approach explored in this study is athlete-centred but coach-directed, and it is this reality that may help provide a platform for its potential acceptance by high performance coaches. Vallée and Bloom (2005) found that successful high performance coaches not only have a genuine desire to help the athletes as individuals, but also take on the responsibility for providing a vision for success for the athletes and the program in general.

I am not naïve enough to suggest that being coach-directed would be enough to sway the interests of high performance coaches toward an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. High performance coaches have a significant commitment to winning and, at times, attach their own personal credibility to their won-loss record (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). Lyle (2002) maintained that the fundamental goal of performance sport does not function in harmony with the developmental goal of humanistic coaching. Therefore, athlete-centred high performance coaching must be shown to generate a competitive advantage before it will be fully embraced. As Lyle (2010) stated, “It is for the academic community to demonstrate in

rather more convincing ways than hitherto that these humanism-based behaviours are effective for both performance and welfare” (p. 451).

This is where the zipper effect (the possibility that two different processes may be balanced effectively to maximize the benefits for an individual) linking demanding and connecting coaching behaviours plays its greatest role. If it is true that high performance athletes are more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviors if they feel their coach genuinely cares about them, it stands to reason they will ultimately be more productive. More athlete productivity should produce more competitive success and, consequently, more high performance coach support for an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Becker (2013) suggested that coaches who address the individual requirements of athletes increase the probability of athlete performance success. In the implications section I speak to the need for more research in the area of the potential competitive advantage of athlete-centred high performance coaching.

At its core, the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach explored in this study was focussed on how high performance coaches can most effectively relate to athletes in the hopes of helping athletes reach their athletic ceilings. The person-centred work of Carl Rogers, applied in the therapist-client world (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005) and the teacher-student world (Nelson et al., 2014), pointed us in the direction of four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles that targeted this relational goal. It was exciting to see that, when actualized by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, these athlete-centred high performance coaching principles produced coaching behaviours that were supported by athletes. This finding was consistent with the research of Falcão et al. (2019) who found that

student-athletes believed the humanistic coaching efforts of their coaches helped both their personal and athletic development.

The reality is that Carl Rogers' principles of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005), along with his commitment to not set limits on the person one is helping (Rogers, 1961), were supported by the athletes and coaches in this study. To my knowledge this is the first time these principles have been specifically explored in a high performance sport setting, and the fact they were so readily received by the coaches and athletes is encouraging news as one ponders further research to enhance their level of acceptance in the high performance coaching world.

Without a doubt, the single most impactful action that emerged from this research was its effect on the coaching perspectives of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. As part of the exploration stage of this study, both coaches experienced six athlete-centred action steps (see Figure 3.1) that led to transformative change in terms of how they viewed their current approach to high performance coaching. In the case of Coach Sommers, the transformation was the realization that relational competence is a significant component of high performance coaching and an essential part of maximizing an athlete's improvement and ultimate competitive success. In the case of Coach Thomas the transformation was a re-awakening to the relational awareness with which he used to coach, an approach to coaching he said had generated greater developmental benefit in the athletes he used to work with.

As Clements and Morgan (2015) demonstrated, having coaches as the actionable outcomes of action research is not unprecedented. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas entered the study with both an understanding of and a willingness to attempt to incorporate

athlete-centred high performance coaching principles into their coaching practices. They were willing to listen to, discuss, and act upon, feedback provided by the athletes and myself, and it is the effect this study has had on their coaching perspectives that captures the project's long-term sustainability. In fact, it is difficult to say how this study would have looked had Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas not been so willing to attempt to actualize the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas may very well coach for several decades. How this study has influenced them will, by extension, influence the sport experience of potentially thousands of athletes who may be coached by them.

It is important to note that the athletes, while playing an essential role in the exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, were not an actionable outcome in and of themselves. Rather, they played an influential role in the action plans carried out by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, and, one could argue, were the beneficiaries of those action plans. As mentioned earlier, athlete support for the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles was evident at both the start and the end of the study. In my opinion, athlete support for the times when Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas imposed demands and built connections harmonized with conclusions emerging from leadership research. For example, one could see evidence of a psychological contract (Propp, 2007) having been established between the athletes and the coaches. The athletes demonstrated significant engagement and focus throughout the indoor season, and their comments suggested that, for the most part, the athletes knew what the coaches expected of them and knew that the coaches valued them as people. Rezanian and Gurney (2016) claimed that the likelihood athletes are motivated, satisfied, and committed to giving extra effort is at its highest when the athletes

feel the psychological contract with their coach has been honored. It is not unreasonable to assume that the heightened level of athlete engagement during this indoor season was at least, in part, due to their support of the coaching efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

An immediately wider-reaching impactful action emerging from the research was the design and delivery of a coaching presentation on the topic of athlete-centred high performance coaching. The idea for the coaching presentation was initiated by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, and its creation served as the culminating point of the study's exploration stage. The foundational information (see Appendix G) for the coaching presentation largely emanated from both the athlete perceptions of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles and the action plan experiences of the coaches. The target audience of the coaching presentation was a collection of academy coaches who were interested in knowing more about an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

The desire to present positive coaching alternatives is something supported in the coaching literature. For example, Stirling (2013) suggested that giving coaches access to workshops that advocate positive approaches to the development of athletes is a practical way of aiding in the development of more positive coaches. The establishment of coaching networks that bring coaches together who pursue a non-abusive approach to coaching is also called for in the literature (Stirling & Kerr, 2014). By getting information about athlete-centred high performance coaching out to a larger group of coaches, the possibility of coach networking relative to this topic was enhanced.

In the hope of reducing the risk of athletes being emotionally abused, one thing Kavanagh et al., (2017) wanted researchers to target was individual coaching behaviours. They

said “Future research could also investigate the behaviour of coaches in performance settings focusing on emotional regulation and coaching skills” (p. 414). This study’s exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach provided important information relative to this request, and the sharing of this athlete-centred high performance coaching approach with a group of academy coaches potentially extended its benefits to a wider audience.

The group of academy coaches who listened to the coaching presentation were an engaged and curious audience. Questions were asked about the presentation, and gratitude was expressed for the presentation. The athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was definitely a discussion-starter. It is my hope that this coaching presentation is only the first of many athlete-centred high performance coaching presentations, where coaches can be exposed to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, can be given the opportunity to seek clarification regarding the implementation of the principles, and can, hopefully, be inspired to consider how the principles may enhance the sporting experience with respect to their own coach/athlete connections.

If we take the coaching presentation that was provided for the academy coaches one step further, I believe that a coaching model targeting the relational competence of a high performance coach can be formulated, based upon the action steps experienced by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas. Though this model would be small in stature when compared with some of the comprehensive coaching models that precede it (Côté et al., 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Jowett, 2007; Côté & Gilbert, 2009), it would hopefully provide an important extension of the humanistic/relational components of the earlier models. I do believe this coaching model, should it be embraced, could potentially move high performance coaches in a

more athlete-centred direction. My experience as a coach has taught me that such a coaching model may be potentially quite beneficial. In my 30+ years of coaching, the professional development I experienced, ranging from local school division coaching in-services to North American-wide coaching clinics, was almost exclusively focused on task competence, as opposed to relational competence. The relational competence side of things tended to be viewed as largely dispositional – coaches either had it or they didn't, and it wasn't really something that people trumpeted as teachable.

This PAR study opens the door to relational competence as a professional development topic for high performance coaches. The athlete-centred high performance coaching six step action plan (see Figure 3.1) that transformed the current coaching perspectives of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas in an athlete-centred direction, could potentially do the same for other high performance coaches.

I would suggest shifting the six step action plan that Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas experienced, into a seven part coaching model with each part functioning concurrently. The reason for this shift is twofold. Firstly, step three of the study's six step action plan actually, for study-specific reasons, embodied two of the study's original athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: the coach acts in the athlete's best interests, and the coach develops within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. Applying this action step to a non-study-specific context mandates that the principles be perceived independently of each other, as was the original intention. Secondly, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas experienced the action steps in a more sequential manner. This occurred, in part, to serve the interests of the exploration stage of the study. In the less controlled reality of high performance sport

outside the walls of this study, the reality is that the athlete-centred high performance coaching action steps function concurrently. Shades of any and all steps may appear in individual coaching behaviours.

The introduction of an athlete-centred high performance coaching model would have to be incremental in nature for the purpose of minimizing initial high performance coach resistance. Perhaps an adaptive mentorship approach (Ralph & Walker, 2013) might be an appropriate context for the introduction of an athlete-centred high performance coaching model in the sense that an adaptive mentorship approach advocates mentors work with mentees according to the developmental reality of the mentees. An adaptive mentorship approach would, therefore, mandate that advocates of the athlete-centred high performance coaching model be mindful of the fact that the pursuit of winning is a key, and sometimes necessary, reality for high performance coaches (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). Consequently, before implementing such a coaching model, high performance coaches would need to be sold on the potential viability of athlete-centred high performance coaching as a way to elevate competitive outcomes.

If a case can be made for the competitive advantage of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, then high performance coaches could be guided through the following seven concurrent coaching principles in the context of how the coaches interact with the athletes: (a) see the sport experience through the athlete's eyes, (b) Identify what the athlete needs and communicate this to the athlete, (c) act in the athlete's best interests, (d) develop within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself, (e) embrace the link between imposing demands and building connections, (f) reflect on what is an

appropriate level of demand to impose on the athlete, and (g) be mindful of not crossing the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse. Figure 3.2 provides a visual representation of the concurrent relational reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching.

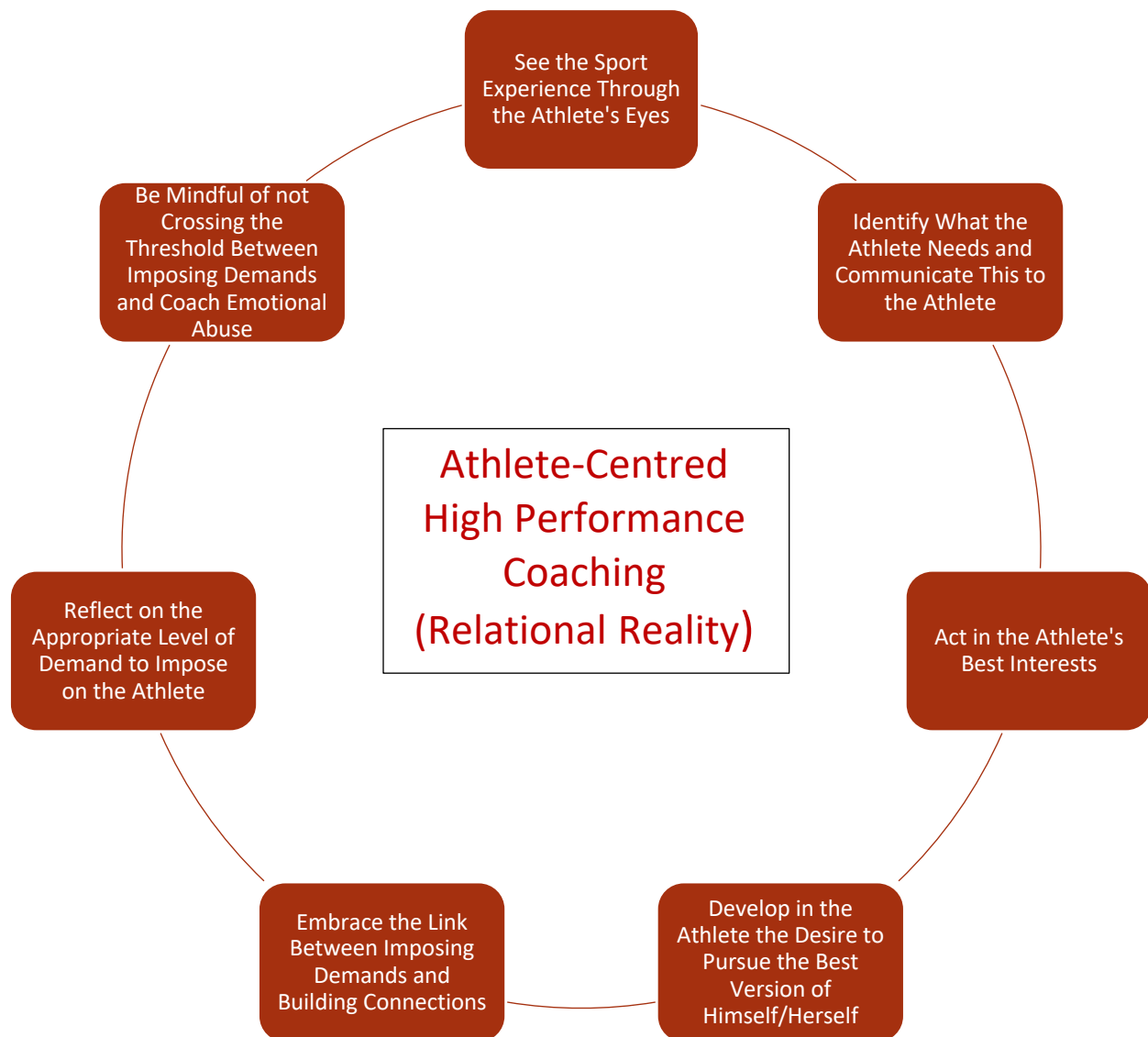


Figure 3.2 The Concurrent Relational Reality of Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching

By making high performance coaches aware of the existence of, and rationale for, an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, we can actually give these coaches a clearly definable athlete-centred high performance coaching model to consider. Should they look to incorporate this coaching model, it may lead them toward embracing a more relationally-competent reality in terms of how they relate to their athletes. In the case of this PAR study, the six athlete-centred action steps that Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas experienced, all ultimately captured in the concurrent reality of an athlete-centred high performance coaching model, led Coach Sommers to genuinely consider relational competence for arguably the first time in his high performance coaching, and led Coach Thomas to be reminded of the coaching relational competence he used to very much value and benefit from. Though much work is still needed to be done in terms of making an athlete-centred high performance coaching model a more detailed and user-friendly conceptualization, it is reasonable to assume that other coaches, who commit to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, may experience the same transformative shift toward a more athlete-centred high performance approach to coaching, as was experienced by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 SUMMARY

The purpose of this participatory action research study was to explore the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. The research question posed for this study emanated directly from the study's purpose: How effective is an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in enabling high performance coaches to help athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being?

The first important step toward answering the research question was getting the commitment of coaches to attempt to implement the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a high performance setting. Two coaches, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas (both pseudonyms), who were coaches of a 16-18 years old male high performance soccer academy team, were approached with this opportunity. Both coaches were interviewed for the purpose of introducing them to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles and determining their support for, or resistance to, the principles.

Both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were in support of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, and were both willing to try and implement them in their upcoming indoor season. They felt that athlete-centred coaching operated in contrast to the traditional more dictatorial approach to coaching. For both coaches, a fundamental point of differentiation between athlete-centred coaching and dictatorial coaching was individualization. They felt athlete-centred coaching was more intentional about coaches

meeting individual athletes wherever the athletes were at developmentally, and both coaches were in favor of this.

Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas valued and embraced the opportunity athlete-centred high performance coaching provided them to build connections with the athletes, both by seeing the sport experience through the athletes' eyes, and by acting in the athletes' best interests. They also appreciated the opportunity athlete-centred high performance coaching gave them to impose demands on the athletes by being congruent with the athletes and pushing and challenging the athletes to pursue their athletic ceilings. As the study progressed, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas resonated with the reality emerging from the research that by intentionally building connections with the athletes they could create conditions where the athletes would be even more receptive and responsive to the coaches' demanding behaviours, provided the coaches didn't cross the threshold into coach emotional abuse.

Following the coaches' interviews, the focus of the study shifted to exploring the effectiveness of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The five-phase PAR model (Stringer & Genat, 2004) provided the infrastructure for this stage of the study, with data gathering, data analysis, communication, and action functioning as the guideposts. The first step in data gathering involved beginning to interview the athletes in order to introduce them to the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles and determine their support for, or resistance to, the principles.

Almost all of the athletes expressed clear support for all of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. They valued coaches seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes and acting in the athlete's best interests – though there was a diversity of athlete

opinion regarding whether the coaches, or the athletes, or both, should determine what is in an athlete's best interests. The athletes also valued coaches being congruent with them and pushing and challenging the athletes to pursue their athletic ceilings. It was particularly noteworthy that, later in the study, a high percentage of the athletes declared that they would be more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours, if they felt the coach genuinely cared about them as people and didn't just view the athletes as resources to be used in the service of winning. According to the athletes, the two main ways that coaches could demonstrate this genuine care would be to (a) take an interest in the athletes' lives outside of the sport and (b) be intentional about providing the athletes with individual help within the sport.

The athlete interview responses, coupled with the athlete responses in my biweekly meetings with them, provided the data for the exploration stage of the study. The coaches and I met after the athlete biweekly meetings and attempted to effectively take data being provided to us by the athletes and, through data analysis and communication, act upon the data to generate action plans that accurately represented an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The efforts of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to take these action plans and try and actualize an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is what made an exploration of the approach's effectiveness possible.

The research experience began pointing to the four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles effectively being categorized into two broader coaching principles (imposing demands and building connections), and the coaches demonstrated a consistent ability, in their interactions with the athletes, to move back and forth between these two broader principles.

The coaches also demonstrated a consistent ability to impose demands without moving past the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse.

Viewing effective athlete-centred high performance coaching as being an appropriate balance between imposing demands and building connections, and acknowledging that coaches building connections with athletes likely makes athletes more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours, were significant discoveries of the athlete-centred high performance coaching exploration stage. By the end of the exploration stage both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were committed to and demonstrating all seven features of what I call the concurrent reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching (see Figure 3.2). They were (a) seeing the sport experience through the athletes' eyes, (b) identifying what the athletes' needed and communicating this to the athletes, (c) acting in the athletes' best interests, (d) developing in the athletes' the desire to pursue the best version of themselves, (e) embracing the link between imposing demands and building connections, (f) reflecting on the appropriate level of demand to impose on the athletes, and (g) remaining mindful of not crossing the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse. The shift of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas toward these athlete-centred high performance coaching commitments comprised the actionable outcomes of this PAR study. Taken collectively they represented a movement of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas toward a more athlete-centred approach to high performance coaching.

The study's purpose was addressed through an intentional theoretical and methodological game plan. In terms of theory, I turned to the world of psychological research, with tangential support from research in the fields of education and leadership, to uncover

theoretical roots that supported an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. The work of Carl Rogers, applied in both psychological (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005) and educational (Nelson et al., 2014) settings provided the impetus for the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles that would drive this study. Linking the work of Carl Rogers with coaching behaviours was not unprecedented. Though not tied to a specific study, Lyle (2002) offered a series of athlete-centred coaching behaviours linked to the work of Carl Rogers for the purposes of academic reflection and consideration. Lyle (2002) hoped that the presentation of these behaviours would potentially generate valuable lessons for those interested in enhancing the coaching profession.

Linking theory to athlete-centred high performance coaching not only built upon the goals of Lyle (2002) but also addressed observations made by Bloom (2016). Bloom (2016) claimed there was currently no clear theoretical infrastructure for athlete-centred coaching and, in part, described athlete-centred coaching as “A recently developed and still understudied coaching strategy...” (p. 305). Linking athlete-centred high performance coaching to the work of Rogers addressed this lack of clarity in the athlete-centred coaching literature, and was a logical approach because, as mentioned earlier, the main focus of Rogers’ work was discerning the foundational attributes of proficient person-to-person interaction as it related to developing the potential of individuals (Nelson et al., 2014).

The focus of Rogers’ work was consistent with athlete-centred high performance coaches embracing a goal of helping athletes pursue their best selves. Vallée and Bloom (2005) echoed this high performance goal when they claimed that one of the key coaching elements involved in the building of a successful university program is the coach being personally

motivated to help athletes grow as individuals. Bloom (2016) went so far as to say “...coaches’ roles and responsibilities in North American university sport extend beyond practice and competition, and include the adoption of an ACA [Athlete-Centred Approach] with their athletes” (p. 307).

In terms of methodology, the desire to better understand an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach led me to the world of participatory action research (PAR). It appeared that athlete-centred high performance coaching had not been the focus of any previous research. Consequently, what was required for my analysis of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach was a first and exploratory step. Gibbon (2002) claimed that PAR is frequently considered just the initial step in the development of a research path, and Stringer (1996) maintained that action research allows the researcher to be fully connected to the research participants as opposed to researching at arms-length. Consequently, taking a PAR approach enabled me to take a first and exploratory step by working, in an immersive way, with coaches and athletes in trying to better understand athlete-centred high performance coaching.

Researching in an immersive way allowed me to get a first-hand look at how the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles were being actualized by the coaches and being received by the athletes. This was extremely valuable in allowing me to develop a clearer understanding of how the coaches and athletes were experiencing an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, as well as enabling me to contribute, in a concrete way, toward their experience. The advantage of this “hands on” approach to research was consistent with the claim of Stringer (1996) who maintained that research that is at arms-length

to the research participants may have little relevance to, and influence on, the actual day-to-day challenges faced by the research participants.

In deciding to take a PAR approach I willingly accepted the reality that I was forfeiting the possibility of generating either causality or generalizability through my research. PAR does not pursue generalization nor causality, and, consequently, the validity of PAR is in part determined by the degree to which it accomplishes its goals – the actionable outcomes (McTaggart, 1998). As mentioned earlier, the primary actionable outcomes of this study were Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas who, in their efforts to actualize athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, found themselves transformed in an athlete-centred direction in terms of their perception of high performance coaching. The transformation they experienced was consistent with a stated goal of action research – the goal of activating research participants' processing that applies a critical lens to the way they have traditionally functioned (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

I am happy that the PAR methodological approach, and the willingness of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas to embrace this approach, made such a transformation possible. As mentioned earlier, coaching male athletes seems to move male coaches toward embracing a more autocratic and demanding leadership style (Pratt & Eitzen, 1989), and, though not inappropriate in and of itself, embracing this leadership style may present these coaches with greater challenges in attempting to adopt athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. The PAR experience of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas seemed to counteract this tendency in a unique and unexpected way. Though both coaches remained demanding in their approach to coaching, they comfortably incorporated an intentional relationship-building

component to their coaching style that seemed to leave the athletes generally feeling more connected to the coaches, as well as potentially being more receptive and responsive to the coaches' demands. It is hard for me to visualize such a significant coaching outcome occurring with a research approach that had been at arms-length from the actual lived experiences of the coaches and athletes.

A final highlight of the PAR approach was the freedom it gave me, as a researcher, to be fully part of the research experience. One of the fundamental principles of PAR is participation of the researcher in the experience of what is being researched, along with encouraging the exchange of ideologies, values, and insights between the researcher and the researched (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The latitude this PAR principle granted me to dialogue with the coaches and the athletes, and share my thoughts throughout the research experience, was extremely valuable. As the research experience unfolded, Coach Sommers, Coach Thomas, and myself got to the point where we essentially functioned as colleagues, bouncing ideas off of each other, and benefiting from the insight and wisdom our collective experience could generate.

Though this very personal research experience did not allow me to generalize the findings, it did allow me to gain a depth of understanding regarding athlete-centred high performance coaching that I do not think would have been attainable in any other way. In my opinion, the seven features of the concurrent reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching (see Figure 3.2) could only have been brought into existence by the intentional merging of theory with participatory action research - an immersive experience whose ultimate direction I could not have anticipated. The Rogerian principles pointed us in a specific direction,

but the conclusions we reached were only made possible by living, through PAR, the experience of athlete-centred high performance coaching.

4.1.1 Limitations

One of the research limitations was that the job security of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas was not clearly tied to winning in the same way it is for some high performance coaches. Banwell and Kerr (2016) identified job security tied to winning as a perspective experienced by high performance coaches, and Jacobs et al. (2017) identified high performance sport as potentially pushing coaches to treat their athletes in less than desirable ways. Though the academy team did play exhibition games, and had high performance goals in terms of athlete development, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did not experience typical high performance pressure to win because the academy team was not competing in a league with other university-prep teams. Therefore, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did not feel their job security was directly tied to winning, and this may have made it easier for them to both embrace and implement athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Whether the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles driving this study would have been effective in the cauldron of a high performance win-or-lose-your-job setting is still an open question.

However, Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did experience the pressure associated with developing their athletes to a high level. Parents paid a considerable amount of money to have their sons part of the academy and expected that their sons would develop to the point where both college and university soccer opportunities were a possibility. If Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas did not deliver, in terms of athlete developmental progress, parents may

have withdrawn their sons from the academy and consequently harmed the academy's financial bottom line. It was the pressure of this reality that led me to conduct the research with these high performance academy coaches, even though the academy team was not competing in a league with other university-prep teams. It is also important to note that the academy model of athlete development is becoming more and more popular in Canada. For example, Balderson (2015) stated "The rise in school-based sport academies is changing the landscape of athlete development in Canada" (p. 27). The expanding academy approach to athlete development increases the possibility of this study's findings being transferable to other sport academies.

A second research limitation was the challenge of asking some of the male athletes to thoroughly articulate their perceptions of athlete-centred high performance coaching. For action research to function most effectively, data analysis must be thorough because it is informing action that is potentially immediately affecting the participants (Bargal, 2008). Consequently, to be competent the action researcher must know the thoughts and wishes of the research participants (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). The hesitance, or perhaps inability, of some of the male athletes to be comprehensive in their responses made it difficult for me to claim with complete confidence that I fully understood their thoughts and wishes. Though a positive rapport was established between myself and the athletes, our significant age difference may have contributed to this challenge. I was old enough to be some of the athletes' grandfather and it's possible some of the athletes may have felt more comfortable conversing with an adult researcher closer to their own age. Though I saw no evidence of ageism displayed by the athletes in their interactions with me, Giles, Coupland, Coupland, Williams, and

Nussbaum (1992) have presented research suggesting "...that young people generally have negative assumptions about communicating with older persons" (p. 292). Giles et al. (1992) also implied that young people may view conversations between generations as dissatisfying. It is possible that these factors contributed to the lack of communication on the part of some of the athletes. Another contributing factor to the lack of expressiveness of some of the athletes may have been a rootedness in antiquated views of what it means to be masculine. Perhaps, some of these young male athletes had been socialized within a traditional approach to masculinity, resulting in them being discouraged from emotional expression that is vulnerable and tender in nature (Levant, 1992).

One of the benefits of my age gap with the athletes was that there was also an age gap with the coaches. I was old enough to be their father and this reality, coupled with me having more than 30 years of coaching experience, enhanced the possibility of them viewing me as not just a researcher, but also a mentor. Though advocating for a broader view of mentorship age realities, Finkelstein, Allen, and Rhoton (2003) stated "Typically, mentoring others is viewed as a role taken on by someone senior who is passing on years of experience and wisdom, whereas the protégé role is that of a novice looking to learn, grow, and advance" (p. 253). Though I consistently emphasized with Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, throughout the study, that this was a research journey we were undertaking together, they were very willing, from the earliest stages of the research, to both share ideas with me and to listen intently to thoughts I had on whatever was being discussed at a particular point in time. I suspect a university researcher who was both younger than them, and lacking in coaching experience, may not have been as readily received by Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas.

A third research limitation was the balancing act required to mesh the necessary organic development of action research with the academic constraints of a Ph.D. study. Gibbon (2002) highlighted "...the time constraints of the university system..." (p. 555) as one of the institutional obstacles present when conducting participatory action research. For me, the academic constraints were most acutely felt in the context of adhering to proper academic order of operations. For example, the academy frequently brought up younger athletes to train with the 16 to 18 years old athletes. Gaining informed consent from this intermittent flow of athletes was indeed challenging. Despite this reality it is not considered acceptable to allow challenging research environments to justify a compromising of the informed consent process. For example, Newton and Appiah-Poku (2007), in discussing the challenge of researching in developing countries, emphasized that individual informed consent still needs to be sought even when faced with the challenge of research participants perhaps not understanding the consent information they are presented with. I succeeded in getting the informed consent of all of the athletes with the exception of one young athlete who had moved to Norway by the time I tried to track him down. Fortunately, his role in the research experience was negligible because he was only present for two of the large number of academy practices and games that I observed.

Macauley, Commanda, Freeman, Gibson, McCabe, Robbins, and Twohig (1999) claimed that the amount of time needed for a participatory action research project may be greater than what the researcher can provide. For logistical reasons this was certainly my reality as I attempted to follow Stringer and Genat's (2004) five phase model for participatory action research. In following Stringer and Genat's (2004) five phase model, I targeted Coach Sommers

and Coach Thomas as the primary actionable outcomes of the study, with their actions intricately linked to data generated by the athletes. I interviewed the athletes during the first five weeks of the indoor season, but I could not use their specific responses until all of the information had been transcribed, shared with the athletes, and approved by the athletes through informed consent. Meanwhile the coach-athlete experience was unfolding in front of my eyes as actual practices and games were taking place – creating a sense of research urgency in terms of implementing the athlete data generation/coach action connection. As mentioned earlier, according to Gibbon (2002) university time constraints can make the using of participatory action research for a doctorate more challenging. I felt this challenge as I dutifully delayed using the athletes' personal data until I had their informed consent.

I was able to manage this challenge by focusing during the first part of the research on the previously established athlete-centred high performance coaching principles and by working with collective athlete responses (for which athletes had already provided informed consent). However, I did have to become fairly diligent as a transcriber, in order to efficiently get to the point where I could use individual athlete interview responses as data. I completely support the university mandated proper protocol leading to informed consent for the use of personal information. It just created a bit of a pressure-filled researcher experience in the context of this participatory action research study. In reflecting on this part of the research experience I think, if I was to conduct a similar study a second time, I would look to, if possible, interview the athletes involved prior to the beginning of their active season. This would enable me to benefit from their individual interview responses right from the beginning of the season.

4.1.2 Implications for Theory

Figure 3.2 (p. 185) highlights the seven athlete-centred high performance coaching principles that make up the concurrent relational reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching. Moving in a clockwise fashion, the first four principles portrayed in Figure 3.2 are all derived from the work of Carl Rogers (1958). The principle of the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes is an extension of Rogers' emphasis on empathy. The principle of the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete is an extension of Rogers' emphasis on congruence. The principle of the coach acting in the athlete's best interests is an extension of Roger's emphasis on unconditional positive regard, and the principle of the coach developing within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself is an extension of Roger's emphasis on a process of becoming. To my knowledge, Rogerian-inspired coaching principles have never been directly applied to the world of high performance sport. Consequently, the large volume of coach and athlete support, in this study, for these principles suggests that Roger's conclusions regarding how to enhance positive personal development, have the same heightened credibility in the high performance sport world as they do in the worlds of psychology and education.

The three remaining athlete-centred high performance coaching principles portrayed in Figure 3.2 were generated in the exploration stage of this study. These principles made a significant contribution to the athlete-centred high performance coaching experience but were not anticipated nor conceptualized prior to the study's start. The principle of the coach embracing the link between imposing demands and building connections emerged from athlete commentary, suggesting that athletes are more receptive and responsive to demanding

coaching behaviours when they feel their coach cares about them as people and does not simply view them as resources to be used in the service of winning. The principle of the coach reflecting on the appropriate level of demand to impose on the athlete emerged naturally from discussions I had with the coaches regarding imposing demands. The principle of the coach being mindful of not crossing the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse emerged from discussions I had with the coaches regarding level of demand and coach emotional abuse, and the importance of coaches keeping their level of demand below the emotionally abusive level. A significant amount of literature exists on the topic of coach emotional abuse (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2008a). The emphasis in this study was not on extending the coach emotional abuse literature, but rather acknowledging that coach emotional abuse is a real and damaging entity, and committing to not crossing its borders.

It is important to note that, in addition to its strong links to the work of Carl Rogers, the athlete-centred high performance coaching model developed in this study functions in harmony with the relational components of earlier more comprehensive coaching models (the CM model of Côté et al. (1995); the Holistic model of Vallée & Bloom (2005); the 3 + 1 Cs Model of Jowett (2007); and Côté & Gilbert's (2009) Integrative model). In terms of the coach-athlete relationship, the athlete-centred high performance coaching model developed in this study also connects with Chelladurai's (1984) more leadership-oriented coaching model, known as the multidimensional model of leadership. When discussing coaching behaviours necessary to properly prepare athletes on a path toward excellence, Chelladurai (2011) emphasized, among other things, that the coach individualizes supportive athlete instruction, provides positive athlete recognition, and also imposes necessary demands on the athlete.

In summary, in terms of theory, the findings of this study suggest that Roger's (1958) work in highlighting conditions that facilitate positive personal development appears to be as relevant in the area of high performance sport as it has been in the areas of psychology and education. The first four principles of the concurrent relational reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching (see Figure 3.2) were derived directly from Roger's work and made a significant contribution to the athlete-centred high performance coaching experienced in this study. The remaining three principles of the concurrent relational reality of athlete-centred high performance coaching (see Figure 3.2) emerged during this study. They were a product of both athlete commentary and discussions I had with the coaches. These principles also made a significant contribution to the athlete-centred high performance coaching experienced in this study. They also, arguably, contribute new insight toward what it means to be an athlete-centred high performance coach.

4.1.3 Implications for Practice

The athletes in this study demonstrated a large volume of support for athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. This support suggests that coaching relational competence is an important coaching quality in the minds of high performance athletes. As mentioned earlier, in my personal experience the topic of coaching relational competence is significantly underrepresented in coaching workshops. Fortunately, the Canadian National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) currently offers two coaching modules (Coaching and Leading Effectively; Empower+) with a relational competence component (Coaching Association of Saskatchewan, 2020a, 2020b). The athlete-centred high performance coaching principles

identified in this study potentially harmonizes with this existing NCCP coaching programming designed to, in part, enhance the relational competence of coaches

The coaching model (Figure 3.2 – The Concurrent Relational Reality of Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching) emerging from this study could be the core around which an Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching workshop was run. Framed under the heading of “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach,” coaches could be introduced to ideas about (a) how to effectively see the sport experience through the athletes’ eyes, (b) how to effectively identify what the athletes need and communicate this to the athletes, (c) how to effectively act in the athletes’ best interests, and (d) how to effectively develop within the athletes the desire to pursue their best selves.

The workshop could then be extended to incorporate the additional athlete-centred high performance coaching principles generated over the course of this study’s exploration stage. The coaches could be introduced to ideas about (a) how to effectively embrace the connection between imposing demands and building connections, (b) how to effectively reflect on the appropriate level of demand to impose on athletes, and (c) how to effectively remain mindful of not crossing the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse.

Many coaching strategies could be discussed in “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach” workshop. For example, if high performance coaches truly see the sport experience through the athletes’ eyes, when they cut athletes they won’t just post team lists on a school hallway bulletin board. Instead, they will meet personally with the athletes who didn’t make the team to discuss the reason(s) why and to offer suggestions for continued athlete improvement. If high performance coaches are truly being congruent with the athletes, they

will schedule regular individual coach-athlete meetings to discuss the athletes' strengths and weaknesses, as well as strategies for the athlete's development. Related to this individualization emphasis, if high performance coaches are truly acting in the athletes' best interests, they will carve out intentional one-on-one time, within their training plan, to work on elevating each athlete's personal competency level. If high performance coaches are truly committed to developing in their athletes the desire to pursue their best selves, the coaches will be very intentional with the athletes in the area of goal-setting. They will encourage yet also challenge the athletes to pursue their best selves – to set goals that are challenging but achievable.

I have chosen to portray the essence of “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach” workshop in the form of a hypothetical letter inviting high performance coaches to attend such a workshop.

Dear Coach,

I am sure that, regardless of the sport you are coaching, you are well-versed in both the technical and tactical aspects of your sport. You are probably also familiar with both the physical and mental requirements of your sport – though I suspect you may have specialists (e.g., strength and conditioning coaches, sport mental training consultants) in place to handle those areas.

I suspect if issues surface during your season regarding skill development or strategic decision-making you are more than capable of providing your athletes with clear and correct information. What, however, is your plan in terms of how you relate to your athletes? Do you relate to them the same way you relate to your own children, your spouse, your colleagues, your students, etc.? Do you relate to them differently because they are high performance athletes?

Let me make this question even more relevant to you in terms of your role as a high performance coach. I know that you feel pressure to win, and I know that you want your athletes to not only pursue but also get as close to their athletic ceilings as they can during their time with you. What way of relating to your athletes gives you the best chance of helping them get as close to

their athletic ceilings as is possible?

This workshop opportunity will help you answer that question. Research from the disciplines of psychology and education has provided empirically-validated principles showing how people can be helped to become all they can be in a chosen area. We now know that these principles are also effective in a high performance sport setting. These principles involve a coach being empathetic and congruent, as well as committed to acting in the best interests of athletes while pushing and challenging the athletes to be all they can be. Following these principles allows a coach to create a sport environment where the athletes are inspired to pursue their best selves without worry about having their physical or psychological well-being compromised.

There have been too many examples of high performance coaches mistreating their athletes. Why is this happening? I firmly believe that the vast majority of high performance coaches don't get into high performance coaching for the purpose of emotionally abusing the athletes. They get into high performance sport for the purpose of helping athletes pursue excellence and winning competitions. High performance athletes have the same goals – they want to pursue excellence and win competitions. But high performance athletes are not wet towels to be wrung out dry by coaches and then discarded on the floor. They are passionate, committed human beings who want to be pushed and challenged, but also want to be respected and valued.

This workshop, on the topic of “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach” will provide you with insights into how you can build connections with your athletes while at the same time impose demands on them. It will show you how to challenge and help your athletes to pursue their best selves, without you crossing the threshold into coach emotional abuse.

When a genuine connection is built between the coach and the athletes, and the athletes don't just feel like they are resources to be used in the service of winning, the athletes will not only be passionate about and committed to their sport experience, but they will be more receptive and responsive to the demands their coach is putting in place. As a coach, by embracing “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach,” you can enhance the probability of athletes realizing their potential, you can enhance the probability of competitions ending up in your favor, and you can enhance the probability of the sport experience being positive and affirming for everyone involved. Come and learn about what it means to embrace “An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach.”

Going beyond the workshop level, sport governing bodies, universities, colleges, and professional leagues could be encouraged to incorporate athlete-centred high performance coaching principles into policies targeting appropriate coach conduct. In addition to holding currently practicing coaches accountable, these policies could potentially form hiring criteria through which a coach's past conduct is vetted, and future employment considered.

Challenges will certainly arise trying to make these types of hiring practices commonplace within the high performance sport sector. The financial bottom line in high performance sport (e.g., gate receipts, guaranteed contracts, etc.) is often tied to wins and losses. A Canadian example of this reality is the Own The Podium organization. Own The Podium is a Canadian high performance sport funding organization that has as its vision "For Canada to be a world leader in high performance sport at the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Own The Podium, 2020)." Own The Podium allocates funding to Canadian Olympic hopefuls based upon their potential to win Olympic medals. This is a policy that draws a straight line between performance and financial compensation. Coaches of Olympic hopefuls will be well aware of the Own The Podium reality, and so too will be the individuals who hire the coaches. One can see the potential challenge of trying to maintain an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach if the desired performance results are not occurring.

Whether at the workshop level, policy level, or hiring level, the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles possess the potential to move coaching practices in the direction of helping athletes pursue their best selves, while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being. However, if athlete performance gains don't accompany improved athlete well-being (Lyle, 2010), it will be difficult for athlete-centered high

performance coaching to garner wide-spread support within the high performance sport community.

4.1.4 Implications for Research

Athletes in this study, by a wide margin, claimed they were more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if they felt their coach genuinely cared about them and didn't just view them as a resource to be used in the service of winning. The logical extension of this athlete perspective is that coaches who intentionally build connections with their athletes are better positioned to help those athletes pursue their athletic ceilings. This is certainly something that could be researched. As Lyle (2010) claimed, an athlete welfare benefit needs to be matched with an athlete performance benefit in order to generate wider acceptance of more humanistic approaches to coaching.

Do coaches who build connections with their athletes help their athletes get closer to their athletic ceilings than coaches who don't? Research methodologies that build upon the findings of this participatory action research study would perhaps be useful in trying to answer this question. As mentioned earlier, participatory action research is a logical first exploratory step (Gibbon, 2002), but both the quantitative and qualitative research worlds have much to offer in building upon the conclusions generated in this study. For example, various techniques for building connections between coaches and athletes (e.g., the coach offering more individual skill instruction) could be quantitatively isolated and assessed in terms of their impact on athlete experience and proficiency. In addition, various performance indicators of athlete proficiency (e.g., personal bests) could be quantitatively measured, relative to the influence of

different coaching approaches, to ascertain if one coaching approach produces more consistent and heightened athlete performance outcomes.

The world of coaches imposing demands on athletes could also be carefully explored, particularly as it relates to the threshold between imposing demands and coach emotional abuse. In addition to building connections with the athletes, both coaches in this study were intentional about imposing demands on the athletes. A large volume of athletes in this study acknowledged and valued the demands placed on them by coaches. The athletes felt these demands helped them pursue their athletic ceilings. Intuitively, we know that, provided there is athlete compliance, an increase in coaching demands will see an increase in athlete work rate. This would logically result in an increase in athlete development provided the coach hasn't compromised the development by crossing the threshold into coach emotional abuse. We know if that threshold is crossed significant negative athlete outcomes can occur (Stirling & Kerr, 2014).

Important research could be conducted in the area of the threshold between the coach imposing demands and the coach being a source of emotional abuse. For example, qualitative research methodology could be implemented to identify what coaching behaviours athletes interpret as humiliating, belittling, and rejecting. Similar methodology could be implemented to identify what coaches interpret as humiliating, belittling, and rejecting coaching behaviours. In addition, one could research whether the interpretation of these behaviours changes depending on the nature of the athlete, the type of sport, or the competitive level of the sport. Owusu-Skeyere and Gervis (2016) shed light on the need for this type of research through their efforts to raise awareness of flawed coaching perceptions regarding athlete mental toughness.

They claimed that coaches tend to believe developing mental toughness in athletes requires putting the athletes in significantly adverse scenarios. According to Owusu-Skeyere and Gervis (2016), lack of coach education in this area is particularly problematic when athletes falter in the face of immoral coach conduct or coach emotional abuse. The unenlightened coaches may view the athletes' struggles as a sign of mental weakness, as opposed to an indication of flawed coaching practices.

There is also an important pragmatic question to address when considering the research findings. How logistically feasible is it for a coach to build connections with the athletes? For example, a head coach of a football team may have, at a university level, 60-90 athletes that are part of the program. How does the coach effectively build connections with that many athletes within the time constraints of the program? Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas experienced the challenge of this, and they were generally dealing with 20-25 athletes. Though the findings of this study pointed primarily to only two essential coaching behaviours needed for building connections with athletes (taking a genuine interest in the athletes' lives outside of sport and providing the athletes with individual instruction within the sport environment), perhaps even these two coaching behaviours are not logistically manageable when the coach-athlete ratios get too high. Expert opinion looking at the world of caring teachers implies that building connections is possible even in high teacher-student ratio scenarios. Noddings (1984) suggested that to help build a caring connection the individual who is providing the caring (e.g. the teacher) must be fully present to the person being cared about (e.g., the student), but it doesn't have to be for long periods of time. Noddings (1984) said:

I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship

with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student – to each student – as he[she] addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total. (p. 180)

Perhaps this type of coach-athlete connection is possible even for coaches who are in scenarios with high coach-athlete ratios. Certainly important research could be conducted in terms of what is required for coaches to effectively build connections with their athletes.

It is important to note that important avenues of research could also be pursued to address issues of relevance for athlete-centred high performance coaching that exist beyond the parameters of this study. For example, this study discovered that athletes viewed the Rogerian-inspired athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in a positive way, but no attempt was made to link this view of the athletes to their particular sport, their level of experience in the sport, or the level they were playing the sport.

It would be naïve to assume that the demands of this academy's sport were equivalent to the demands of other sports. Research could certainly be conducted to determine if athlete-centred high performance coaching principles are more or less readily preferred in different sport settings. Perhaps the nature of other sports predisposes athletes in those sports to value different things in their coaches.

It is also important to consider the years of experience an athlete has in a sport when pondering athlete perceptions of athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. Though the interviewed athletes in this study were fairly close in age, there was not complete uniformity in terms of their years of experience with the sport. Perhaps athletes who are

newer to the sport would perceive the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles in somewhat different ways than athletes with more experience in the sport.

In terms of level of sport, the coaches in this study suggested that athletes' need for connection with the coach may diminish as the high performance level of the sport increases. This could certainly be explored. Most of the athletes in this study were training with hopes of obtaining college or U-sport playing opportunities. How athletes already experiencing those opportunities, or competing at Olympic and professional levels, would view this study's athlete-centered high performance coaching principles is worthy of investigation.

Coach and athlete interpretations of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles is also worthy of investigation. Understanding the reasons why coaches and athletes associate the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles with particular coaching attributes could help further the coach-athlete connection in high performance sport. Appendix F provides a potential starting point for this type of research. It offers a list of general themes portraying how the coaches and athletes in this study interpreted the principles.

4.1.5 Concluding Remarks

On a final note, it cannot be overstated how intentional both Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas were in trying to coach in an athlete-centred high performance way. Is this coaching commitment, on the part of Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas, a realistic undertaking for the general coaching population, or were Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas unique in their efforts? The potential exists for extensive research across the coaching population by exposing coaches to athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, giving coaches the

opportunity to take the principles out for a “test drive,” and carefully chronicling their experiences.

The reality is that the exploration of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is an ongoing process. This particular study only targeted high performance male coaches working with high performance male athletes. The entire world of female high performance sport, and the inter-connected world of male coaches working with female athletes, and female coaches working with male athletes, remains unexplored in terms of athlete-centred high performance coaching. Coach Sommers and Coach Thomas are to be commended for taking exploratory steps into the world of athlete-centred high performance coaching. Many studies with many coaches can follow their lead and continue to make strides in ultimately capturing what it means to be an athlete-centred high performance coach.

REFERENCES

- Balderson, D. (2015). Sport academies: A growing phenomenon in Canadian schools. *Physical & Health Education Journal*, 80, 27-29.
- Banwell, J., & Kerr, G. (2016). Coaches' perceptions of a high performance sports model in Canadian interuniversity sport (CIS). *Journal For the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education* 10, 1-15. doi:10.1080/19357397.2016.1160692
- Batholomaeus, B. D. (2012). *Athletes' perceptions of democratic and autocratic coaching behaviours used by high school football coaches* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1517675)
- Bargal, D. (2008). Action research: A paradigm for achieving social change. *Small Group Research*, 39, 17-27. doi:10.1177/1046496407313407
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 60, 854-857. doi:10.1136/jech.2004.028662
- Becker, A. J. (2013). *Quality coaching behaviours*. In: Potrac, P., Gilbert, W., & Denison, J. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sport Coaching* (pp. 184-195). London: Routledge.
- Bennie, A., & O'Connor, D. (2010). Coaching philosophies: Perceptions from professional cricket, rugby league and rugby union player and coaches in Australia. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 5, 309-320. doi:10.1260/1747-9541.5.2.309
- Bloom, G. A. (2016). Coaching psychology. In: P.R.E. Crocker (Ed.), *Sport and exercise psychology – A Canadian perspective (3rd edition)* (pp. 288-317).
- Bloom, G. A., Falcão, W., & Caron, J. (2014). Coaching high performance athletes: Implications for coach training. In: A. R. Gomes, R. Resenda, & A. Albuquerque (Eds.), *Positive Human Functioning From a Multidimensional Perspective: Promoting High Performance (Volume 3)* (pp. 107-131). New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Bolden, R., Hawkins, B., Gosling, J., & Taylor, S. (2011). *Exploring leadership: Individual, organizational and societal perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brackenridge, C., Bringer, J., & Bishopp, D. (2005). Managing cases of abuse in sport. *Child Abuse Review*, 14, 259-274. doi:10.1002/car.900
- Bradley, E. H., Curry, L. A., & Devers, K. J. (2007). Qualitative data analysis for health services research: Developing taxonomy, themes, and theory. *Health Services Research*, 42, 1758-72. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6773.2006.00684.x

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action Research*, 1, 9-28. doi:10.1177/14767503030011002
- Chelladurai, P. (1984). Discrepancy between preferences and perceptions of leadership behavior and satisfaction of athletes in varying sports. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 6, 27-41. doi.org/10.1123/jsp.6.1.27
- Chelladurai, P. (2011, September). *Leadership in sports*. Paper presented at the First Congress of the Federation de Asociaciones de Gestores del Deporte de Espana (FAGDE), Madrid, Spain.
- Clarke, H., Smith, D., & Thibault, G. (1994). *Athlete-centred sport: A discussion paper*. Federal/Provincial/Territorial Sport Police Steering Committee.
- Clements, D., & Morgan, K. (2015). Coach development through collaborative action research: Enhancing the learning environment within a national talent development system. *Sports Coaching Review*, 4, 139-161. doi:10.1080/21640629.2016.1159453
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th edition)*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Coaching Association of Saskatchewan. (2020). Coaching and leading effectively (National Coaching Certification Program). Retrieved from saskcoach.ca/event/coaching-and-leading-effectively/
- Coaching Association of Saskatchewan. (2020). Empower+ (National Coaching Certification Program). Retrieved from saskcoach.ca/event/empower-2/
- Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4, 307-323. doi:10.1260/174795409789623892
- Côté, J., Salmeal, J., Trudel, P., Baria, A., & Russell, S. (1995). The coaching model: A grounded Assessment of expert gymnastic coaches' knowledge. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 17, 1-17. doi:10.1123/jsep.17.1.1
- Curtin, M., & Fossey, E. (2007). Appraising the trustworthiness of qualitative studies: Guidelines for occupational therapists. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 54, 88-94. doi:10.1111/j.1440-1630.2007.00661.x

- Davis, L., & Jowett, S. (2014). Coach-athlete attachment and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship: Implications for athlete's well-being. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 32, 469-482. doi:10.1080/02640414.2014.898183
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1987). The support of autonomy and the control of behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1024-1037. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.53.6.1024
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research. In: N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research (3rd edition)* (pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- de Souza, A., & Oslin, J. (2008). A player-centered approach to coaching. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance*, 79, 24-30. doi:10.1080/07303084.2008.1059815
- Dewar, M. (2012, June). Evocative Coaching [Executive summary of the book *Evocative coaching: Transforming schools one conversation at a time*, by B. Tschannen-Moran & M. Tschannen-Moran]. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Donoso-Morales, D., Bloom, G. A., & Caron, J. G. (2017). Creating and sustaining culture of excellence: Insights from accomplished university team-sport coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88, 503-512. doi:10.1080/02701367.2017.1370531
- Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23, 2850-2861.
- Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., Caron, J. G., & Gilbert, W. D. (2019). Youth athletes' perceptions of humanistic coaching. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 50, 523-547. doi:10.7352/IJSP.2019.50.523
- Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Bennie, A. (2017). Coaches' experiences learning and applying the content of a humanistic coaching workshop in youth sport settings. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 4, 279-290. doi.org/10.1123/jscj.2017-0027
- Farmer, T., Robinson, K., Elliott, S., & Eyles, J. (2006). Developing and implementing a triangulation protocol for qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16, 377-394. doi:10.1177/1049732305285708
- Finkelstein, L. M., Allen, T. D., & Rhoton, L. A. (2003). An examination of the role of age in mentoring relationships. *Group & Organization Management*, 28, 249-281. doi:10.1177/1059601103028002004
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 219-245. doi:10.1177/1077800405284363

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Frisby, W., Reid, C., Millar, S., & Hoeber, L. (2005). Putting “participatory” into participatory forms of action research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19, 367-386.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.19.4.367>
- Gabelica, C., Van den Bossche, P., De Maeyer, S., & Segers, M. (2014). The effect of team feedback and guided reflexivity on team performance change. *Learning and Instruction*, 34, 86-99. doi:[10.1016/j.learninstruc.2014.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2014.09.001)
- Gallmeier, C. P. (1988). Methodological issues in qualitative sport research: Participant observation among hockey players. *Sociological Spectrum*, 8, 213-235.
doi:[10.1080/02732173.1988.9981855](https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.1988.9981855)
- Gervis, M., & Dunn, N. (2004). The emotional abuse of elite child athletes by their coaches. *Child Abuse Review*, 13, 215-223. doi:[10.1002/car.843](https://doi.org/10.1002/car.843)
- Gervis, M., Rhind, D., & Luzar, A. (2016). Perceptions of emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship in youth sport: The influence of competitive level and outcome. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 1, 772-779.
doi:[10.1177/1747954116676103](https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954116676103)
- Gibbon, M. (2002). Doing a doctorate using a participatory action research framework in the context of community health. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 546-558.
doi:[10.1177/104973202129120061](https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120061)
- Giles, H., Coupland, N., Coupland, L., Williams, A., & Nussbaum, J. (1992). Intergenerational talk and communication with older people. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 34, 271-297. doi:[10.2109/TCMU-OU65-XTEH-B950](https://doi.org/10.2109/TCMU-OU65-XTEH-B950)
- Gillis, A., & Jackson, W. (2002). *Research for nurses: Methods and interpretation*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company.
- Gould, D., Laver, L., Rolu, C., Jannes, C., & Pennisi, N. (2006). Understanding the role parents play in tennis success: A national survey of junior tennis coaches. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 40, 632-636. doi:[10.1136/bjsm.2005.024927](https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsm.2005.024927)
- Hocine, Z., & Zhang, J. (2014). Autonomy support: Explaining the path from leadership to employee creative performance. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 2, 417-423.
doi:[10.4236/jss.2014.26048](https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2014.26048)
- Jackson, B., Grove, J. R., & Beauchamp, M. R. (2010). Relational efficacy beliefs and relationship quality within coach-athlete dyads. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 1035-1050. doi:[10.1177/0265407510378123](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510378123)

- Jacobs, F., Smith, F., & Knoppers, A. (2017). 'You don't realize what you see!': The institutional context of emotional abuse in elite youth sport. *Sport in Society*, 20, 126-143. doi:10.1080/17430437.2015.1124567
- Jowett, S. (2007). Interdependence analysis and the 3 + 1 Cs in the coach-athlete relationship. In: S. Jowett & D Lavalley (Eds.), *Social psychology in sport* (pp. 15-27). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kao, S. F., & Tsai, C-Y. (2016). Transformation leadership and athlete satisfaction: The mediating role of coaching competency. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 28, 469-482. doi:10.1080/10413200.2016.1187685
- Kavanagh, E., Brown, L., & Jones, I. (2017). Elite athletes' experience of coping with emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 29, 402-417. doi:10.1080/10413200.2017.1298165
- Kawulich, B. (2005). Participant observation as a data collection method. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6, 1-22. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.2.466
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory action research. In N.Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research (2nd edition)* (pp. 567-605). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2005). Participatory action research: Communicative action and the public sphere. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd edition)* (pp. 559-603). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kirschenbaum, H., & Jourdan, A. (2005). The current status of Carl Rogers and the person-centered approach. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 42, 37-51. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.42.1.37
- Konradt, U., Schippers, M.C., Garbers, Y. & Steenfatt, C. (2015). Effects of guided reflexivity and team feedback on team performance improvement: The role of team regulatory processes and cognitive emergent states. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24, 777-795. doi:10.1080/1359432X.2015.1005608
- Kowalski, K. C., McHugh, T-L. F., Sabiston, C. M., & Ferguson, L. J. (2018). *Research methods in kinesiology*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.
- Lara-Bercial, S., & Mallet, C. J. (2016). The practices and developmental pathways of professional and Olympic serial winning coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 3, 221-239. doi:https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0083

- Leech, B. L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semi-structured interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35, 665-668. doi:10.1017/S1049096502001129
- Levant, R. (1992). Toward the reconstruction of masculinity. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 5, 379-402.
- Lorimer, R., & Jowett, S. (2013). Empathic understanding and accuracy in the coach-athlete relationship. In: Potrac, P., Gilbert, W., & Denison, J. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sport Coaching* (pp. 321-332). London: Routledge.
- Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: A framework for coaches' behaviour*. London: Routledge.
- Lyle, J. (2010). Holism in sports coaching: Beyond humanistic psychology: A commentary. *International Journal of Sport Science & Coaching*, 5, 449-452. doi:10.1260/1747-9541.5.4.439
- Macauley, A.C., Commanda, L.E., Freeman, W.L., Gibson, N., McCabe, M. L., and Robbins, C. M., & Twohig, P. L. (1999). Participatory research maximizes community and lay involvement. North American primary care research group. *British Medical Journal*, 319, 774-778. doi:10.1136/bmj.391.7212.774
- MacDonald, C. (2012). Understanding participatory action research: A qualitative research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 13, 34-50. doi.org/10.33524/cjar.v13i2.37
- McHugh T-L, F. (2008). *A new view of body image: A school-based participatory action research project with young Aboriginal women* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada). Retrieved from <https://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/etd-11032008-080446>
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 1-12. doi:10.1177/2333393615597674
- McNiff, J. (2001, January). *Action research and the professional learning of teachers*. Paper presented at the Qattan Foundation, Palestine.
- McTaggart, R. (1998). Is validity really an issue for participatory action research? *Studies in Cultures, Organizations, and Societies*, 4, 211-236. doi:10.1080/10245289808523513
- McTaggart, R. (1999). Reflection on the purposes of research, action, and scholarship: A case of cross-cultural participatory action research. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 12, 493-511. doi.org/10.1023/A:1022417623393

- Nelson, L., Cushion, C. J., Potrac, P., & Groom, R. (2014). Carl Rogers, learning and educational practice: Critical considerations and applications in sports coaching. *Sport, Education, and Society*, 19, 513-531. doi:10.1080/13573322.2012.689256
- Newton, S.K., & Appiah-Poku, J. (2007). The perspectives on obtaining informed consent in developing countries. *Developing World Bioethics*, 7, 19-24. doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-8847.2006.00147.x
- Nichols, B. A. (2015). *Predicting coaching efficacy in national collegiate athletic association assistant coaches: A social psychological analysis of coaching goals, commitment, and values* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10038442)
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Own The Podium. (2020). Vision, mission, mandate, goals, and values. Retrieved from Ownthepodium.org/en-CA/About-OTP/Vision,-Mission,-Mandate-Goals
- Owusu-Sekyere, F., & Gervis, M. (2016). In the pursuit of mental toughness: Is creating mentally tough players a disguise for emotional abuse? *International Journal of Coaching Science*, 10, 3-23.
- Pelletier, L. G., Fortier, M. S., Vallerand, R. J., & Briere, N. M. (2001). Association among perceived autonomy support, forms of self-regulation, and persistence: A prospective study. *Motivation and Emotion*, 25, 279-306. doi.org/10.1023/A:1014805132406
- Pillow, W.S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the use of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Education*, 16, 175-196. doi:10.1080/0951839032000060635
- Pratt, S. R., & Eitzen, D. S. (1989). Differences in coaching philosophies between male coaches of male and female basketball teams. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 24, 151-161. doi:10.1177/101269028902400205
- Preston, C. (2013). *Elite athletes' experiences of athlete-centred coaching* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1571154)
- Prior, M. (2017). Accomplishing "rapport" in qualitative research interviews: Empathic moments in interaction. *Applied Linguistics Review*, May, 1-25. doi:10.1515/applirev-2017-0029

- Propp, A. J. (2004). *Patterns of the psychological contract among rural Saskatchewan vice Principals* (Master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada). Retrieved from <https://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/etd-04262004-193355>
- Ralph, E., & Walker, K. (2011). *Adapting mentorship across the professions: Fresh insights and perspectives*. Calgary: Detselig Publishing.
- Rezania, D., & Gurney R. (2016). The effect of coaching practices on psychological contract fulfillment of student-athletes. *Physical Culture and Sport: Studies and Research*, 71, 21-29. doi:10.1515/pcssr-2016-0016
- Rink, J. (2014). *Teaching physical education for learning – seventh edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Robertson, J. (2000). The three Rs of action research methodology: Reciprocity, reflexivity, and reflection-on-reality. *Exploring Action Research*, 8, 307-326. doi:10.1080/09650790000200124
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21, 95-103. doi:10.1037/h0045357
- Rogers, C. R. (1958). The characteristics of a helping relationship. *Personal & Guidance Journal*, 37, 6-16. doi:10.1002/j.2164-4918.tb01147.x
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, C. R. (1978). *Carl Rogers on personal power*. London: Constable and Company Ltd.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, January, 68-78. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 1069-1081. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069
- Schinke, R. J., Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2013). Pathways for community research in sport and physical activity: Criteria for consideration. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*, 5, 460-468. doi:10.1080/2159676X.2013.846274

- Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2017). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-21. doi:10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357
- Smith, R. E., Smoll, F. L., & Cumming, S. P. (2007). Effects of a motivational climate intervention for coaches on young athletes' sport performance anxiety. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 29, 39-59. doi:10.1123/jsep.29.1.39
- Smoll, F. L., & Smith, R. E. (2008). *Coaches who never lose: Making sure athletes win, no matter what the score (3rd edition)*. Palo Alto, CA: Warde Publishers, Inc.
- Stirling, A. E. (2013). Understanding the use of emotionally abusive coaching practices. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 8, 625-639. doi:10.1260/1747-9541.8.4.625
- Stirling, A. E., & Kerr, G. A. (2008a). Defining and categorizing emotional abuse in sport. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 8, 173-181. doi:10.1080/17461390802086281
- Stirling, A.E., & Kerr, G.A. (2008b). Elite female swimmers' experiences of emotional abuse across time. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 7, 89-113. doi:org/10.1300/J135v07n04_05
- Stirling, A. E., & Kerr, G. A. (2009). Abused athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship. *Sport in Society – Culture, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 12, 227-239. doi:10.1080/17430430802591019
- Stirling A. E., & Kerr, G. A. (2013). The perceived effects of elite athletes' experiences of emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 11, 87-100. doi:10.1080/1612197X.2013.752173
- Stirling, A. E. & Kerr, G. A. (2014). Initiating and sustaining emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship: An ecological transactional model of vulnerability. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma*, 23, 116-135. doi:10.1080/10926771.2014.872747
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research*. London: SAGE Publications
- Stringer, E. T., & Genat, W. J. (2004). *Action research in health*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Tibbert, S. J., Andersen, M. B., & Morris, T. (2015). What a difference a “mentally toughening” year makes: The acculturation of a rookie. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 17, 68-78. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.10.007

- Tobin, S. A. (1991). A comparison of psychoanalytic self psychology and Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 31*, 9-33.
doi:10.1177/0022167891311002
- Vallée, C. N., & Bloom, G. A. (2005). Building a successful university sport program: Key and common elements of expert coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 17*, 179-196.
doi:10.1080/10413200591010021
- Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64*, 678-691. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.64.4.678
- Wilson, D., Bennett, E. V., Mosewich, A. D., Faulkner, G. E., & Crocker, P. R. E., (2019). "The zipper effect": Exploring the interrelationship of mental toughness and self-compassion among Canadian elite women athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 40*, 61-70.
doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.09.006
- Wormeli, R. (2006). *Fair isn't always equal: Assessing & grading in the differentiated classroom*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PHASE 1:

Introductions.

This will be the first time I am interviewing my respective participants.

- The initial overlying objective will be to welcome participants to the research study and briefly describe myself and my study. Also, I will thank them for agreeing to participate in my study.

Consent.

Participants will be asked to complete a consent form, pertaining to the current study.

- They will be given time to read through the consent form and ask any questions they may have about consent or the content of the study.
- At this time, participants will choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the interview. The same pseudonym will also be used when they return for the second interview.
- I will now briefly explain that the interview will be recorded with an audio recorder, at which time I will start recording.

Demographics Questionnaire.

- Can you tell me your birthday, including the year?
- How many years of experience do you have playing competitive sport?
- How many times per week do you train/compete/coach?
- What is the highest level of sport you have competed or coached at within the past 12 months?

Rapport Building.

I will spend a brief amount of time conversing with participants, to make them feel comfortable talking to me, which should make the interview feel more natural. Hopefully, this will result in the sharing of more detail during the interview.

Some of the topics that may be discussed during the rapport building portion of the interview include, but are not limited to:

- How many years have you played/coached soccer?

- Have you played/coached other sports? If so, what other sports?
- What is it about sport participation that most appeals to you and why?
- What has been a highlight of your experience in sport up to this point in time?
- Is there anything you think particularly differentiates soccer from other sports? If so, what differentiates it?

Overview of Topics.

I will offer a description of how the remainder of the interview will unfold, explaining that we will initially discuss the concept of an athlete-centred high performance coach, followed by some questions seeking to understand the interviewee's experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the four foundational principles of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach.

1. Have you ever heard of the term "athlete-centred" coach and, if so, what is your interpretation of what that term means?
2. Research arguably points toward an athlete-centred high performance coach seeking to adhere to the following four foundational principles when coaching his/her athletes:
 - 1) See the sport experience through the athlete's eyes.
 - 2) Identify what the athlete needs and communicate this to the athlete.
 - 3) Act in the athlete's best interests.
 - 4) Develop in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself.
 - a) Do you agree with these principles?
 - b) If so, why, and if not, why not?
 - c) Are there any other athlete-centred high performance coaching principles you think should be added to the list?
 - d) If so, what principles should be added and why?
3. The first athlete-centred high performance coaching principle involves the coach seeing the sport experience through the athlete's eyes.
 - a) What do you think it means for a coach to try and see the sport experience through the athlete's eyes?
 - b) As an athlete, did you ever have a coach who tried to see your sport experience through your eyes?

- c) If yes, what was that experience like?
 - d) If no, what other way of being coached do you remember most and what was that experience like?
4. The second athlete-centred high performance coaching principle involves the coach identifying what the athlete needs and communicating this to the athlete.
- a) What do you think it means for a coach to try and identify what the athlete needs and communicate this to the athlete?
 - b) As an athlete, did you ever have a coach who tried to identify what you needed and communicate this to you?
 - c) If yes, what was that experience like?
 - d) If no, what did your coaches talk to you about and what were those experiences like?
5. The third athlete-centred high performance coaching principle involves the coach acting in the athlete's best interests.
- a) What do you think it means for a coach to try and act in the athlete's best interests?
 - b) As an athlete, did you ever have a coach who tried to act in your best interests?
 - c) If yes, what was that experience like?
 - d) If no, how did your coaches act around you and what were those experiences like?
6. The fourth athlete-centred high performance coaching principle involves the coach developing in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself.
- a) What do you think it means for a coach to try and develop in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself?
 - b) As an athlete, did you ever have a coach who tried to develop in you the desire to pursue the best version of yourself?
 - c) If yes, what was that experience like?
 - d) If no, how did your coaches try to motivate you and what were those experiences like?

7. In summary, when considering its strengths and limitations, what is your impression of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach?
8. Is there a different approach to high performance coaching you prefer and, if so what is that approach and why do you prefer it?

APPENDIX

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title:

An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Approach: A Participatory Action Research Study

Researchers:

Ph.D. Student Investigator: Mark Epp, College of Kinesiology, 306-229-7693,
mark.epp@usask.ca

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kent Kowalski, College of Kinesiology, 306-966-1079,
kent.kowalski@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to engage in a collaborative team-based participatory action research (PAR) study in partnership with high performance sport academy male coaches and male athletes to provide the coaches and athletes an opportunity to both experience and enhance an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Some potential actionable outcomes of this study may be both internal and external. Internally, the action may occur on each journey through the PAR phases as feedback from the coaches and athletes, combined with input from the researcher, informs a continuous refinement of the athlete-centred high performance coaching approach. Externally, the action may take the form of a post-study coaching workshop and website designed to make public the refined athlete-centred high performance coaching approach in hopes of extending its benefits to a wider audience.

Procedures:

Your participation will be required in three phases. Phase one occurs near the beginning of the sport academy's fall/winter training season and involves a one-on-one semi-structured interview conducted at a time and location of your convenience, and led by Ph.D. student investigator, Mark Epp. The interview will begin with some demographic questions and an opportunity to build rapport with the student investigator, Mark Epp. Thereafter, you will be asked questions about your perspectives, experiences, and opinions related to the four foundational principles of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach: 1) seeing the sport experience through the eyes of the athlete, 2) identifying the needs of the athlete and communicating this to the athlete, 3) acting in the athlete's best interests, and 4) developing in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. The length of the interview will not be predetermined so you can expand and elaborate to the extent you desire. While the length of the Phase I interview is not predetermined, you can expect it to take approximately 45-60 minutes.

Phase two involves participant observation on the part of the student investigator, Mark Epp, throughout the fall/winter training season, coupled with biweekly meetings between Mark Epp

and the coaches and athletes. The observation and biweekly meetings focus on the principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching as they are being actualized in this sport academy's experience. Mark Epp will, during practices and games, observe the coach-athlete relational dynamic in the context of the previously described four athlete-centred high performance coaching principles, and record these observations using field notes. Mark Epp will also, in a participant role as an academy sport mental training coach, try to adhere to these athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. In addition to observing coaches and functioning as a coach, Mark Epp will observe how the athletes appear to be affected by the various coach behaviours.

The research data gathered through these participant observation efforts will help inform the dialogue the coaches, athletes, and Mark Epp engage in targeting the principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching. This dialogue will be facilitated through biweekly informal staff meetings involving Mark Epp and the other coaches, as well as biweekly informal player de-briefing meetings involving Mark Epp and the players as a group. In these informal meetings Mark Epp will share the details of his observations as they relate to the principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching and listen carefully to feedback from the coaches and the athletes regarding their support, rejection, or modification of his observations. The coaches and athletes will also have the opportunity to contribute their own observations to the discussion.

The biweekly meetings will always strive for some type of collectively generated take-away action plan relative to the principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching that the coaches and athletes can look to implement in the next two-week period. The action plans will be designed to bring the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles to life in the experiences of these high performance coaches and athletes. The actual coach and athlete actions will be thoroughly documented and their impact will be observed, recorded, and discussed in a detailed way.

Phase three occurs at the end of the sport academy's fall/winter training season and also involves a one-on-one semi-structured interview. This interview will be summative in nature. It will encourage reflection on the entire action research experience and seek clarification of any potential actionable outcomes that have emerged. The four principles of athlete-centred high performance coaching will provide a continuous infrastructure upon which the second interview questions will be based.

Funded by:

Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), through the Sport Participation Research Initiative (SPRI), awarded to Drs. Kent Kowalski (College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan), Amber Mosewich (Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta), and Leah Ferguson (College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan).

Potential Risks:

You will not be subjected to any physical or psychological risks. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, at which time the discussion will be redirected. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. Although we do not expect any psychological risk, the research study may be sensitive in nature for you. If you feel participation is placing you under stress we will discontinue your involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. If you wish, any data collected prior to this point will be omitted from the study and destroyed. Below is a resource you can use if you would like professional help dealing with your personal experiences.

University of Saskatchewan Health Services – (306) 966-5768

University of Saskatchewan Counseling Services – (306) 966-4920

Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services – free help line: (306) 933-6200

Potential Benefits:

Benefits of participation in this study cannot be guaranteed, but you may develop an increased understanding of an athlete-centred high performance coaching approach, which may play a role in enhancing your experience of sport. The athlete-centred high performance coaching approach is designed to teach and challenge athletes to pursue the best version of themselves while remaining mindful of the athletes' physical and psychological well-being.

Confidentiality:

The data from this study will be used to complete the student investigator's Ph.D. dissertation, and may appear in a scholarly journal and/or be presented at an academic conference. However, *your identity* will be kept confidential. Although direct quotations from interviews might be reported, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name), and all identifying information (name, address, etc.) will be removed from our report. Names or other identifying information will not be discussed or made public outside of the research team, and audiotapes will be identified by code number and stored in a secure, locked office. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored separately from the master sheet identifying names, pseudonyms, and code numbers.

After your interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Also, it is important that you are aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers may be obligated to report to relevant authorities, should they arise in our conversations (e.g., child abuse, intent to conduct violence, etc.).

Storage of Data:

All research material will be securely stored in the office of the principal investigator, Dr. Kent Kowalski, at the University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years post publication of the findings. Thereafter, paper files will be shredded and audiotapes will be discarded.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research study for any reasons, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. However, your right to withdraw data from the study will only apply until results have been disseminated (i.e., the research study has been submitted for publication to a scholarly journal). After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Follow up:

Results of the study will be distributed by email to all participants upon completion of the research, by the student investigator, Mark Epp.

Questions or Concerns:

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the student investigator, Mark Epp, or the principal investigator, Dr. Kent Kowalski, using the information provided at the top of Page 1. This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee through the Research Ethics Office (ethics.office@usask.ca or 306-966-2975). Out of town participants may call toll free (866) 966-2975.

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

APPENDIX C

Transcript Release Form

TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal information that was given during the interview session in this study, and I have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in the interview with Mark Epp. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript (to researchers Mark Epp and Dr. Kent Kowalski) to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Transcript Release Form for my own records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX D

2018/2019 Academy University Prep Program (Males) Skill Self-Assessment Sheet

2018/2019 University Prep Program (Males) Skill Self-Assessment Sheet

“Excellence is the best version of yourself, not some external standard.”

“You are defined by your pursuit of excellence, not by your attainment of it.”

“Pursuing excellence means going for it, not just hoping it will happen.”

Pursuing the Best You as a Soccer Player

If 10 represents your perception of the best you could ever be, please rate yourself from 1 to 10 in terms of your perception of your current ability in the following areas. Please feel free to use decimal points (e.g., 6.4).

Dribbling Skills

Turns	_____
Running with the ball	_____
Feints and dribble	_____
Beating an opponent	_____
Escaping an opponent	_____

Receiving Skills

Control with Foot	_____
Control with Thigh	_____
Control with Chest	_____
Control with Head	_____

Passing Skills

On ground with inside of foot	_____
On ground with instep	_____
Long pass	_____
Chip/Lofted pass	_____
Swerve pass – inside of foot	_____
Swerve pass – outside of foot	_____
Crossing	_____

Shooting Skills

Instep	_____
Half volley	_____
Volley	_____
One on one with Goal Keeper	_____

Heading Skills

Basic technique	_____
Defensive header	_____
Attacking header	_____

Goal Keeping Skills

Basic Catching Techniques	_____
Positioning	_____
Diving	_____
Distribution	_____
Advanced Techniques (e.g., crosses etc.)	_____

Attacking Skills

Attacking as an individual 1v1	_____
Crossing balls into the penalty box	_____
Finishing	_____
Communication on Offense	_____
Positional Play on Offense	_____

Defending Skills

Defending as an individual (1v1)	_____
Marking	_____
Recovery	_____
Communication on Defense	_____
Positional Play on Defense	_____

Identify what you feel are the three skill areas you most need to improve. What is one thing, within your direct control, you can do to improve in each area?

Skill Area - _____

Improvement Strategy – _____

Skill Area - _____

Improvement Strategy – _____

Skill Area - _____

Improvement Strategy - _____

APPENDIX E

Foundational Information for the Academy Coaching Presentation on the Topic
“An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coach”

Foundational Information for the Academy Coaching Presentation on the Topic
“An Athlete-Centred High Performance Coach”

High performance coaches who exhibit sustained success with their athletes possess a combination of task-competence (knowing what to teach and how to teach it) and relational competence (knowing how to relate to their athletes). This information addresses a coach’s relational competence.

In terms of relational competence, how can someone most effectively help someone else realize their potential? Research from the world of psychology and the world of education suggests four qualities possessed by the helper maximize the effectiveness of the help they are providing. These four qualities are as follows:

- 1) the helper views the ones they are trying to help as being in a process of becoming, not a finished product,
- 2) the helper demonstrates congruence in their interactions with the ones they are trying to help, meaning they are real, honest, and authentic,
- 3) the helper demonstrates empathy for the ones they are trying to help, and
- 4) the helper demonstrates unconditional positive regard for the ones they are trying to help.

These four qualities are potentially very important for high performance coaches to possess as they try to help high performance athletes realize their potential. In a high performance sporting context these four qualities can be represented by the following coaching principles:

- 1) the coach develops within the athletes the desire to pursue the best version of themselves (viewing the athletes as being in a process of becoming),
- 2) the coach identifies what the athletes need and communicates this to the athletes (being congruent with the athletes),
- 3) the coach views the sport experience through the eyes of the athletes (demonstrating empathy for the athletes), and
- 4) the coach acts in the athletes’ best interests (demonstrating unconditional positive regard for the athletes).

Twenty-four high performance athletes were interviewed for the purpose of determining their opinions regarding these coaching principles. Four of these athletes discontinued with the academy prior to giving informed consent for the release of their interview information. To the best of my knowledge, their reasons for departure were not negative, but simply a product of life choices (e.g., prioritizing academics). Twenty of the athletes provided written informed consent for the release of their interview information. In these interviews, the athletes expressed a large volume of support for all of the principles. What follows are a few quotes from athletes that represent this support.

The Coach Develops Within the Athletes the Desire to Pursue the Best Version of Themselves

- "I like it, like, they want me to push forward, they want me to, like, be the best I can be"
- "I think it's good because then, like, like I said...I like it, it's better when a coach, you know, comes to you and tells you...you can do this better, you can do this and then you become better"
- "I think [this]...is really important, like, really, really important, because if they're pushing you to get to your best, right, and your, like, out of your comfort zone then you should really, then you're probably going to be improving"

The Coach Identifies What the Athletes Need and Communicates This to the Athletes

- "I think...the honesty...is kind of, I think, most important. Just because it kind of, it'll motivate that person or that team to kind of get better because you need to, you need to know where you're actually at"
- "...I think the coach should be...pretty straight up with a player...about how they need to improve. I don't think, like, there's like no room for like, ...softening it up"
- "...you have to have someone who has to be honest with you. Not just all the time being like 'oh no that was, that was very good.' He has to be realistic, be like maybe you should improve on that, because like once you go onto a higher level you will be like, 'whoa, I should have worked on that when I was younger.'"

The Coach Views the Sport Experience Through the Eyes of the Athletes

- "...I would like to see more coaches pretty much just, almost just have more inspiration and know what the player's going through, and know...the other side of their life and just understand that kind of feeling..."
- "I did [have a coach who saw the sport experience through my eyes] and honestly it, it feels good because you know like a coach that does care about you and he wants you to do better"
- "I like those ones [coaches who view the sport experience through their athletes' eyes] ...they're more understanding and don't just scream at you all the time if you made a mistake. They're like 'kay why did you make that mistake, more'

The Coach Acts in the Athletes' Best Interests

- "...it's not necessarily them [the coaches] just looking out for themselves, and maybe trying to just climb up the ladder, they're actually trying, they want the athletes to develop and be the best that they can be and have success all around them"
- "...I think maybe like an example [of a coach acting in a player's best interests] would be just if an athlete's injured, even if they, they really like that athlete and they're a good person for their team, they're not gonna try and, like, overplay them just to get a result. They kind of think about the injury and hope, like, kind of, help them get better with it instead of just looking to get the result or whatever"

- “it [a coach acting in a player’s best interests] is also probably a good thing cause like obviously every coach who goes into coaching probably wants his players to be better, so I would say if he is going to set up a drill for you or something like that, obviously he wants you either to improve that part of your game or wants you to just improve in general”

What has become apparent through the athlete interview responses is that the athletes are supportive of their coaches both “imposing demands” (developing within the athletes the desire to pursue the best version of themselves; and identifying what the athletes’ need and communicating this to the athletes) and “building connections” (viewing the sport experience through the athletes’ eyes; and acting in the athletes’ best interests). “Imposing demands” and “building connections” are not often talked about in the same sentence. In fact, some people may think they have an inverse relationship – as one becomes stronger the other one becomes weaker. And yet, the intriguing message from the athletes was that they want both of these features to be a part of the high performance coaches who coach them.

One possible explanation for this unique reality is found in an academic construct called “The Zipper Effect.” The zipper effect suggests that just like opposing teeth on a jacket are brought together by a zipper, it is possible for two otherwise independent processes to function in an interrelated way to produce a common desirable outcome. Within the athlete interview responses there were specific athlete quotes that might suggest the existence of a zipper effect when it comes to coaches embracing both the imposing of demands and the building of connections. Here are some athlete statements that point to the possible existence of this zipper effect.

- “...it’s good to have a connection with your players if you’re a coach because then you’re not like, they don’t like hate you or anything. Cause if you have a good relationship with them, right, then, they’re gonna come to practice wanting to train and not, like, cause if you don’t have that connection, you don’t have the relationship, then they’re gonna come to practice, like, not 100 percent. They’ll be coming 50%, they’ll just want to get it over with”

- “So, I think it’s like if you’re gonna work hard for, like, a bad coach then, like, you don’t want to work hard at all, and, like, if this coach, like, just doesn’t care about you’re development or anything then, like, why would I work hard for you, but, ...I think if they’re actually gonna be there and, like, kinda build that relationship, like, take the first step, I think, it would make me as a player wanna play harder and, like, make me more driven, I think”

- “...so once you have that kind of coach [a coach that sees the sport experience through the athlete’s eyes] it will improve you to do better. It will motivate you to come to practice, it will motivate you to do other things a, a lot better than what you used to do”

It appears that athletes who feel their coaches have a genuine connection with them may be more receptive and responsive to the demands their coaches are placing on them. During one of my meetings with academy athletes I asked them to on paper, and without signing their names, answer yes or no to the following question: “Are you more receptive and responsive to demanding coaching behaviours if you feel your coach genuinely cares about you and doesn’t just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning?” Overwhelmingly

the players said yes. It appears that high performance athletes want their coaches to both “impose demands” and “build connections.” It also appears that high performance athletes are more receptive and responsive to coaching demands if a genuine connection has been built between the coach and the players and the players feel their coach actually cares about them as people. Building such a connection does not require a vast amount of effort on the part of the coach. When asked what a coach could say or do that lets you know he genuinely cares about you and doesn’t just view you as a resource to be used in the service of winning, the athletes identified two main coaching practices: 1) talk to them (and show a genuine interest) about things that are going on in their lives, and 2) provide them with individual instruction to help them improve as a player.

An analogy that might be helpful to better understand the zipper effect between “imposing demands” and “building connections,” is that of the treble and base controls on a sound system. When you are listening to a piece of music, you can turn the treble up without the base automatically being turned down. You can turn the base up without the treble automatically being turned down. Ultimately you are trying to find the level of both that makes the song sound just right. As a coach, depending on the level of sport you are coaching, the type of athlete you are dealing with, and the nature of your competitive experience, you will play with these levels to try and get the combination that most effectively helps athletes realize their potential.

Though “imposing demands” and “building connections” seem to function as independent processes in an athlete-centred high performance coach, if “imposing demands” crosses over a threshold into what is described in the coaching literature as “coach emotional abuse,” building connections, athlete psychological well-being, and athlete performance can be compromised.

The threshold between “imposing demands” and “coach emotional abuse” is crossed when a coach resorts to behaviours that include, among others, humiliating, belittling, and rejecting players. These coaching behaviours can be devastating to a player and are not part of what it means to be an athlete-centred high performance coach.

APPENDIX F

General Themes Regarding the Coaches' and Athletes' Interpretations of the Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Principles

General Themes Regarding The Coaches' and Athletes' Interpretations of The Athlete-Centred High Performance Coaching Principles

I would like to thank my external examiner, Dr. Gordon Bloom, for highlighting the need for a clearer thematic analysis picture. Consequently, in addition to the data analysis pathway information provided in Figures 2.2 and 2.3, I have produced the general themes associated with the coach and athlete interpretations of the athlete-centred high performance coaching principles. These general themes are presented in Appendix F.

Two coaches and twenty athletes were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the following athlete-centred high performance coaching principles: (1) The coach sees the sport experience through the athlete's eyes, (2) The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete, (3) The coach acts in the athlete's best interests, and (4) The coach develops within the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself. Both coaches and all twenty athletes viewed all four principles in a positive way. To produce general themes regarding the coaches' and athletes' interpretations of the principles, interview data was delimited to descriptions of coach attributes.

The coaches' interpretation of the principle "The coach sees the sport experience through the athlete's eyes" generated 4 coach responses that loosely fit into two general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of coach responses connected to the theme followed by the number of coaches who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by both coaches in order to be included.

- 1) Possessing empathy (2/2)
- 2) Understanding what the other person is going through (2/2)

The athletes' interpretation of the principle "The coach sees the sport experience through the athlete's eyes" generated 60 athlete responses that loosely fit into six general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of athlete responses connected to the theme followed by the number of athletes who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by at least two athletes in order to be included.

- 1) Demonstrating an understanding of the athlete's perspective (31/19)
- 2) Teaching the athlete (12/9)
- 3) Individualizing instruction (6/4)
- 4) Helping the athlete improve (5/5)
- 5) Minimizing negative interactions (4/3)
- 6) Varying practices (2/2)

The coaches' interpretation of the principle "The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete" generated 6 coach responses that loosely fit into two general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of coach responses connected to the theme followed by the number of coaches who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by both coaches in order to be included.

- 1) Having important conversations with the athlete (4/2)
- 2) Wanting what is best for the athlete (2/2)

The athletes' interpretation of the principle "The coach identifies what the athlete needs and communicates this to the athlete" generated 32 athlete responses that loosely fit into six general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of athlete responses connected to the theme followed by the number of athletes who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by at least two athletes in order to be included.

- 1) Educating/enlightening the athlete (17/14)
- 2) Helping the athlete improve (5/5)
- 3) Being straightforward with the athlete (4/3)
- 4) Pushing/encouraging the athlete (2/2)
- 5) Individualizing instruction (2/2)
- 6) Motivating the athlete (2/2)

The coaches' interpretation of the principle "The coach acts in the athlete's best interests" generated 7 coach responses that loosely fit into two general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of coach responses connected to the theme followed by the number of coaches who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by both coaches in order to be included.

- 1) Teaching life skills (4/2)
- 2) Being willing to have the tough conversations (3/2)

The athletes' interpretation of the principle "The coach acts in the athlete's best interests" generated 34 athlete responses that loosely fit into five general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of athlete responses connected to the theme followed by the number of athletes who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by at least two athletes in order to be included.

- 1) Prioritizing the athlete's well-being (9/6)
- 2) Maximizing the athlete's sport experience (8/7)
- 3) Individualizing instruction (6/5)
- 4) Guiding/helping the athlete (6/4)
- 5) Managing injuries appropriately (5/5)

The coaches' interpretation of the principle "The coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself" generated 5 coach responses that loosely fit into two general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of coach responses connected to the theme followed by the number of coaches who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by both coaches in order to be included.

- 1) Assisting the athlete (3/2)
- 2) Finding out why the athlete may not be inspired/competitive (2/2)

The athletes' interpretation of the principle "The coach develops in the athlete the desire to pursue the best version of himself/herself" generated 34 athlete responses that loosely fit into four general themes. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets representing the number of athlete responses connected to the theme followed by the number of athletes who provided the responses. A response had to be provided by at least two athletes in order to be included.

- 1) Inspiring/motivating the athlete (26/16)
- 2) Pushing the athlete (3/3)
- 3) Helping the athlete improve (3/3)
- 4) Teaching the athlete (2/2)